



# Bitterroot Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan EIS

## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

### Quarterly Update—Spring 2025

Website: <https://www.fws.gov/BitterrootEIS>

In January 2024, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) initiated the development of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for the restoration of grizzly bears in the Bitterroot Ecosystem of Idaho and western Montana.

The following entities are cooperating agencies assisting the Service in the preparation of the EIS:

- U.S. Forest Service
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game
- Idaho Office of Species Conservation
- Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks
- Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
- Nez Perce Tribe
- Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe
- Coeur d'Alene Tribe
- Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs
- Custer County, ID
- Mineral County, MT
- Ravalli County, MT
- Missoula County, MT
- Sanders County, MT

### Purpose and Need and Alternatives

Based on public comments and cooperating agency input, the purpose and need for the EIS is:

**Purpose:** The purpose of the action is to contribute to the resiliency of grizzly bears in the lower-48 States range-wide by (1) encouraging repopulation of grizzly bears in the Bitterroot Ecosystem (BE) to help ensure long-term survival and contributing to overall grizzly bear recovery through redundancy in multiple populations and representation in a variety of habitats; and (2) fostering social acceptance of grizzly bears on the landscape.

**Need:** This action is needed to comply with the April 26, 2023, order in *AWR et al. v. Cooley et al.*, No. 9:21-cv-00136-DWM (D. Mont.). This action is also needed because grizzly bears in the BE, one of six ecosystems identified for the recovery of the grizzly bear in the lower-48 States (FWS 1993), are functionally extirpated. Although we previously decided to reintroduce grizzly bears into the BE (FWS 2000b), we have not implemented that decision. Since designating the non-essential population in 2000, we have observed individual bears from other ecosystems dispersing through the BE and adjacent areas with greater regularity, particularly in the past several years. We now anticipate that a population of grizzly bears (defined as two or more breeding females or one female with two consecutive litters) may become established in the BE through natural recolonization in the next 15 to 30 years.

From the purpose and need, public comments, cooperating agency input, and the limits of Service authority, the Service has identified and will analyze the effects of following alternatives:

- No Action Alternative - As required by NEPA

- Proposed Action - Natural recolonization with Service actions to provide education and conflict reduction.
- Alternative A - Reintroduction with introduced grizzly bears managed as a 10j non-essential experimental population.
- Alternative B - Reintroduction with introduced grizzly bears managed as threatened.

## Current Status and Next Steps

The Service is working closely with cooperating agencies and conducting internal reviews. After this, we anticipate releasing the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for public comment later in 2025. The Service will also continue providing quarterly updates throughout the NEPA process.

