



GREAT BEAR FOUNDATION

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Ms. Jamie Clark
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GRIZZLY BEAR RECOVERY PLAN HEARING, JUNE 17, 1997

The Great Bear Foundation Comments

Dear Ms. Clark:

My name is Dr. Charles Jonkel, I have conducted research on bears for just over 38 years. In 1959, there were only 6 scientists engaged in bear research, including me. Research had been delayed until the advent of the "dart gun" in 1957, and the development of the quick-acting immobilizing drug succynal choline chloride. There was almost no literature on bears; we had to develop all of the techniques. Most people, including most biologists, disliked bears, and valued them negatively. Enormous amounts of federal, state, provincial, and logging/mining/livestock association money was spent each year, just to kill bears, get rid of them.

In one phase of my research on bears, I worked as a research scientist for the Canadian Wildlife Service, and began their Polar Bear Project. Early on, and with almost no polar bear data base, the Canadian Government was pressured by the Soviet Government to stop hunting polar bears, on the grounds that they were endangered world-wide; and they were in the USSR. They had suffered terrible losses in the Soviet Arctic during the war. The belief, then, was that there was but one, circum-polar population of polar bears, since the sea ice moves clockwise around the Polar Basin, at a speed of 7 miles per day.

Canada had lots of polar bears, but I couldn't prove it in time. I developed a strategy to show that there were different sub-populations, and that the Canadian populations were doing just fine, and could be managed by population units. Using only minimal habitat data, the knowledge I had about black and grizzly bears, and a fair bit of "farm boy horse sense," I drew a map of what I thought were likely to be the polar bear sub-populations. It looked impressive enough for us to draw up the Polar Bear Agreement, protecting Canada's position and management program.


A few years back, a current Canadian polar bear biologist told me this: "Do you remember that map of polar bear sub-populations you developed only from habitat information--well, we have now spent about \$30,000,000 dollars on polar bear research, and we cannot change a single line, 20 years later."

In the late 1970's, I did some basic research in the Cabinet Mountains. I wrote numerous papers stressing the extreme status of those bears, and their habitat. Basically, I showed that there

were grizzlies there, in very low numbers, and that the habitat was so fractured, that they could not recover, unless land areas/grizzly habitat were protected at a much higher level. My reports were essentially ignored, because the USFS did not want to expand wilderness, restrict logging/mineral development. So I changed my strategy, and demanded that if we were not going to take positive steps to expand/protect bear habitat, then we should quit lying to the public that we were working for grizzly bear recovery in that area. That advice, too, was ignored, by all of the agencies concerned. Things have changed little, since then, and the official position still seems to be "lets pretend that we want the grizzly bears to recover in that area," and to do little of what is necessary. Twenty years have gone by, lots of money has been spent, but the necessary habitat and corridors are still un-protected.

Since the first draft of the Recovery Plan I have pleaded for the protection and management of crucial grizzly habitat corridors, but in draft after draft, my suggestions have been pointedly left out. The Evaro Pass, Sapphire, Gold Creek/Flint Creek Range, Bull River, Southern Whitefish Range/Apgar Range/Teakettle/Lion Mountain, and the whole Rocky Mountain/Rocky Mountain Trench corridors are still unprotected/un-managed. The corridors are absolutely crucial, for long-term grizzly survival/recovery. Anyone could understand that, if they would just remind themselves that in 50 years, Western Montana, Northern Idaho, Northwestern Wyoming, are going to look like Seattle to Tacoma. People flying around in jets, staying at fancy hotels, saying "grizzly bear, grizzly bear," won't help much, and that is about all that is happening "for the bears," currently. The legers show millions of dollars spent on recovery, but little is actually helping the bears, getting to the bears. THAT is the main problem in recovery, in the Plan, in the process. In the days of independent research, things were different--they could be again.

Early in my studies on grizzly bears, under the Border Grizzly Project, we developed the concept of identifying critical habitat as Grizzly Bear Habitat Components. The idea was to identify key areas, in all of the territory out there--locate them, document their importance, map them, and then manage them for the grizzly. By focussing research and management effort, time, and money on the key habitat components, we noted that we could do a lot more for the bear, with lot less. I always likened the concept to the way you would run a ranch--concentrate your efforts and work in the bottomlands, the rich bench lands, and let the rest to wildlife and a little seasonal grazing. It makes good sense, it works, and is a lot less costly. The Forest Service, especially, did not like the concept, and pushed for mapping all of the forest, whether it was important to the bears or not, thereby undercutting the whole concept of the Components. Basically, my point is, that if we really want to take care of the bears, it is not nearly as difficult as people pretend. We could do it now, easily, and without the political/bureaucratic agendas and manipulations which have enveloped Grizzly Recovery.


Dr. Charles Jonkel, GBF
Scientific Advisor