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YELLOWSTONE:

Jane Goodall spearheads push to keep protecting grizzlies

Emily Yehle, E&E reporter

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Jane Goodall joined more than 50 scientists today in urging the Fish and Wildlife Service to keep Yellowstone grizzly bears protected under the Endangered Species Act.

The scientists sent a **letter** to Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and FWS Director Dan Ashe expressing "strong opposition" to the proposal to remove the bear from the threatened species list. More than 700 grizzlies roam the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), and FWS asserts that the population is stable.

But today's letter calls that population estimate a "contested figure." Grizzlies face multiple threats, such as loss of food in a changing climate and hunting, according to the scientists, who hail from universities throughout the country as well as Spain, Canada and Australia.

"FWS is not scientifically justified in concluding with certainty that the GYE population has reached long-term stability and is therefore secure for the foreseeable future," they write in the letter. "There is far too much uncertainty reflected in the current science to justify such a conclusion; rather, the best available science and the precautionary principle demands continued federal monitoring of this vulnerable population, which will only happen with continued ESA protection."

The Center for Biological Diversity obtained a copy of the letter and distributed it today. CBD is among the environmental groups that have sharply criticized FWS for its proposal to delist the bear. Some other groups, such as the National Wildlife Federation, say a delisting is warranted.

The letter calls the delisting premature, arguing that handing over management of the species to states will jeopardize a species that those same states value for trophy hunting. It accuses FWS of rushing public comment on the proposal "in order to rapidly delist grizzly bears for what appear to be more political than scientific reasons."

"Forty years ago when the grizzlies of the Yellowstone ecosystem numbered less than 150 individuals, and their survival seemed precarious, it was thanks to protection under the Endangered Species Act, in 1975, that their number today has risen slowly," Goodall, the famed primatologist and founder of the Jane Goodall Institute, said in a statement. "But their future isn't secure yet, because they face so many threats to their survival."

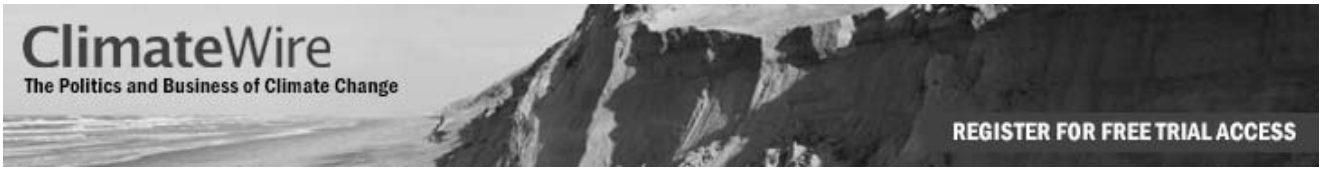
FWS first delisted Yellowstone grizzlies in 2007. However, the U.S. District Court for the District of Montana reversed that decision, in litigation by Earthjustice.

The court found, among other things, that FWS had not fully considered the threats posed by the decline of whitebark pine. The tree is a key food source for the bear and is at risk from climate change.

FWS most recently proposed delisting the bear in March, determining that the grizzly would adapt and find other food sources (***E&ENews PM***, March 3).

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