GYE Conservation Strategy Habitat Subcommittee **May 26, 2016**

Participants: Ken McDonald (MT FWP), Dan Tyers (USFS), Kerry Gunther (YNP), Jennifer Fortin-Nelson (USFWS), Tom Rice (County Commissioner).

McDonald will continue to chair the subcommittee

Theme 1: Other methods to monitor foods (i.e. body condition) (similar to Theme 3)

Originated by: NPS

Is the Theme necessary to update the CS based on changes that have occurred in the science, delisting framework or to improve the strategy? YES - food monitoring commitments described in CS are much less relevant than when originally included in the 2007 CS.

Is this item relevant to the Conservation Strategy or should it be addressed somewhere else? Needs to be addressed in the CS – essentially scaling back commitment to monitoring 4 high caloric foods in favor of indices such as body condition, stable isotope analysis, or sampling protocols.

Additional time required by sub-group to address theme: FWS and Study Team will work on adaptive wording to phase out commitment for 4 high caloric foods in exchange for something more cost effective and useful – 8 weeks.

Notes: Important to add more relevant metrics to the CS and to enable moving away from monitoring of the 4 main foods described in the CS. Look at index such as body condition as surrogate for food. This is what they do in NCDE – and is already being collected.

Agency staffs are spending a lot of time on this and it likely isn't relevant – not getting much out of it. Was a litigation stop gap at time but currently cost is much greater than benefit.

Theme 2: Updated habitat layer (vs. 1998 layer) see also Theme 7 (use 2016 as baseline)

Originated by: USFS

Is the Theme necessary to update the CS based on changes that have occurred in the science, delisting framework or to improve the strategy? NO – 1998 baseline is a component of the habitat-based criteria in the recovery plan. Would require modification to 2007 recovery plan amendment.

Is this item relevant to the Conservation Strategy or should it be addressed somewhere else? Because it is a component of the recovery plan, changing the CS without a recovery plan amendment would create contradiction between the CS and Recovery Plan.

Additional time required by sub-group to address theme: None. Refer to Appendix E for better discussion of the issue.

Notes: Massive database exists relative to 1998 baseline conditions. If the baseline was changed, you would lose expression of improvements that have occurred since then and some flexibility that goes with that. Changing the baseline would be a significant change to recovery status, would delay delisting, and would likely be a significant

When first developed, the 1998 database was not as effective/accurate as it is now. Fixes to errors in the baseline have been corrected over time. Management of the database continues to be a huge task.

Theme 3: A lot of commitments that sound like we are still managing a listed species. We cannot maintain that level of effort (e.g., monitoring number of hunters). Need to be able to trust each other and levels of commitment

Originated by: USFS

Is the Theme necessary to update the CS based on changes that have occurred in the science, delisting framework or to improve the strategy? YES – examples were provided to USFWS in Oct 2015 (power point was given to Executive Managers in October). Includes number of hunters, 2 season road analysis and monitoring road opening and closing, and other variables not necessary for monitoring the overall status of griz bear recovery.

Is this item relevant to the Conservation Strategy or should it be addressed somewhere else? Yes – primarily clean up items to reflect current and relevant commitments

Additional time required by sub-group to address theme: 6 weeks - Review Power point suggestions from USFS; USFS goes through doc and suggests edits/deletions consistent with what has been suggested previously by USFS. Committee will review changes suggested by USFS

Notes: Includes items that are not being done or are no longer relevant to overall recovery commitments, so the document needs to be cleaned up.

Theme 4: Definitions of dispersed vs. developed sites and implications. As defined, some proactive measures would be precluded.

Originated by: USFS

Is the Theme necessary to update the CS based on changes that have occurred in the science, delisting framework or to improve the strategy? YES – Current language on Page 65 is problematic to USFS, and will require discussion with FWS

Is this item relevant to the Conservation Strategy or should it be addressed somewhere else? YES – need clarity to where we go. Options include: change definitions, ignore baseline, or modify baseline.

Additional time required by sub-group to address theme: 6 weeks - USFS and FWS work to develop alternative language that works for both (FS and FWS).

Notes: 1998 baseline tracks developed/administrative sites. Does not track dispersed sites. Some dispersed (not developed) camp locations get so much use that infrastructure is being added (e.g., attractant storage sites, pads, picnic tables) similar to a developed site, but still not tracked as a developed site.

Concern is that with current definitions of dispersed sites, if minimal infrastructure is added and improvements have been made, then they will be considered a developed site that requires mitigation as a new development. This discourages responsible stewardship.

Longer term issue: Major developments such as new employee housing, expanded campgrounds, etc. Current acre for acre approach makes these types of developments extremely difficult, and doesn't reflect contemporary conditions. Recommend this issue continue to be worked on post-delisting to accommodate changing needs. Generally the subcommittee supports exploring a buffered footprint approach to future development vs. acre for acre. E.g., building envelopes within existing housing complexes that could accommodate new housing development, or envelope around developed campgrounds that could accommodate expanded capacity and reduce the volume of dispersed camping.

Recommend the issue be worked on in an adaptive framework by the YGCC post-delisting.

Theme 5: Lot of commitments to monitor outside the PCA – need to evaluate what really needs to be monitored and why (e.g., road monitoring vs. standards)

Originated by: USFS

Is the Theme necessary to update the CS based on changes that have occurred in the science, delisting framework or to improve the strategy? YES – if there are existing monitoring commitments and expectations that don't necessarily reflect important variables for maintaining recovered g bears.

Is this item relevant to the Conservation Strategy or should it be addressed somewhere else? Yes, although this may have already been addressed. CS needs to be closely reviewed, and any such commitments addressed.

Additional time required by sub-group to address theme: 4 weeks - FS and FWS need to review Chapter 3 and identify any existing examples of this theme, and suggest edits to address concerns.

Notes: FS does not support extending 1998 standards outside the PCA, but had previously committed to monitoring those variables (e.g., road system) in case some time in the future it was decided to extend standards beyond the PCA. Should they be held accountable for monitoring different variables if they are tied to standards? Essentially holding the database prepatory to a possible change in the standards outside the PCA (which are not supported by FS)

Theme 6: Conversation between USFS and States re: habitat protections outside the PCA

Originated by: USFS

Is the Theme necessary to update the CS based on changes that have occurred in the science, delisting framework or to improve the strategy? NO - Important issue, but outside the scope of the CS

Is this item relevant to the Conservation Strategy or should it be addressed somewhere else?
Somewhere else – collaboration and coordination between state and FS at the Forest level.

Additional time required by sub-group to address theme: NA

Notes: This issue is related to connectivity between NCDE and GYE. There should not be a formal expectation that standards outside the PCA and GYE should be the Should be handled locally/provincially vs. in the CS. This is outside the scope of the CS

Theme 7: Use 2016 developments as the baseline

Originated by: County Commissioners

Is the Theme necessary to update the CS based on changes that have occurred in the science, delisting framework or to improve the strategy? No – see Theme 1

Is this item relevant to the Conservation Strategy or should it be addressed somewhere else? no

Additional time required by sub-group to address theme:

Notes: See Theme 1
