Habitat Standards inside Yellowstone National Park

Since 1998, visitor use to Yellowstone National park has increased significantly, necessitating the need for additional infrastructure to responsibly accommodate current, and likely future, increases in visitor use. The objectives of the habitat standards are to reduce displacement of bears and to reduce human-caused mortality. YNP has adequately addressed both of those issues through the implementation of the Bear Management Area program in 1982 (YNP 1983), which restricts or closes public use of seasonally important habitat in the park. From 2002 to 2014, human-caused mortality was extremely low within YNP, averaging 1.1 per year. During the same period, only 7 mortalities occurred from vehicle strikes along roads (0.54 per year) and 4 human-cause mortalities (0.31 per year) were associated with human developments. Major developed sites, such as Old Faithful and Mammoth, do not represent preferred habitat for bears, and therefore a slight increase to the footprint or capacity of developed may have minimal to no impact on the GYE grizzly bear population. Associated modifications to the level of secure habitat and motorized access route density would also have minimal to no impact on the GYE grizzly bear population. The level of secure habitat for those BMUs that are contained within YNP is significantly greater than those outside of YNP (*see* Figure 2 and Appendix E). As such, it is acceptable to consider slight changes to the 1998 baseline within YNP to accommodate increased infrastructure needs while minimizing impacts to higher priority habitats.

Application Rules within YNP

The number and capacity of developed sites within YNP will be maintained at or below the 1998 level with the following exceptions:

- Any proposed increase, expansion, or change in use of developed sites from the 1998 baseline in YNP will be analyzed through the NEPA process, and potential detrimental and positive impacts documented through biological evaluation or assessment by the action agency.
- Any construction of new sites that biological evaluation indicates will have detrimental impacts to grizzly bears, will be mitigated for within that BMU to offset any detrimental impacts caused by the increase in the number of developed sites and/or capacity for human use, habitat loss, and increased access to surrounding habitats. Examples of mitigation within that BMU may include: increased information and education;

increased conflict prevention resources (e.g., improved sanitation); or increased law enforcement and patrols.

- Changes to existing developed sites or new sites are acceptable as long as these changes or new developments: 1) do not increase the number of visitor overnight use sites and/or result in increased overnight visitor presence at existing sites; 2) are for the purpose of visitor safety or environmental protection such as toilets, parking areas, or interpretive displays; and 3) that appropriate sanitation and human-bear conflict minimization efforts are associated with any such changes or enhancements.

Literature Cited

Yellowstone National Park. 1983. Record of Decision on Final Environmental Impact Statement (FES 83-6) for Grizzly Bear Management Program. Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming. 217 pp.