

Request for Peer Review

Background

Grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos*) in the lower 48 States were listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1975. Excessive, unregulated human-caused mortality was the primary factor leading to grizzly bear decline. Today, grizzly bears in the lower 48 States persist in five separate ecosystems, including the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA), with Yellowstone National Park at its core. Since their listing in 1975, the GYA population of grizzly bears has nearly tripled in size and doubled its range. While human-caused mortality remains the limiting factor for nearly all grizzly bear populations in the world, including in the GYA, partner agencies and Tribes have successfully regulated this mortality to stay within sustainable limits that allow for population stability or growth.

To effectively manage human-caused mortality, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service establishes demographic recovery criteria that are monitored by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team. Some mortality is unavoidable in a dynamic system where hundreds of bears inhabit large areas of diverse habitat with several million human visitors and several hundred thousand residents. The objective of demographic recovery criteria is to ensure the long-term persistence of the GYA population of grizzly bears while allowing for human removal of some individuals when they become a threat to human safety or livestock.

Substance of the Review

We are proposing to update portions of the Demographic Recovery Criteria in the GYA based on new scientific analyses, information, and methods. We are seeking peer review on these Proposed Revisions to gain an independent scientific perspective and ensure our management approach will allow us to meet our demographic objective. Specifically, we are seeking peer review on two documents that are interrelated: (1) the Proposed Revisions to the Demographic Recovery Criteria for the Grizzly Bear Population in the Greater Yellowstone Area; and (2) the Application Protocol for these Proposed Revisions. These proposed revisions were the result of a scientific report produced by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team in 2012 titled: "Updating and Evaluating Approaches to Estimate Population Size and Sustainable Mortality Limits for Grizzly Bears in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem." Your review will require that you decide if, in your judgment, this report provides appropriate scientific support for the proposed revisions. The purpose of seeking independent peer review is to ensure that the best biological and scientific data are being used in this revision process, as well as to ensure that reviews and input by recognized experts are incorporated into the final Demographic Recovery Criteria.

If you agree to be a peer reviewer of these documents, we ask you to consider, but not limit your responses, to the following questions and provide any other relevant comments, criticisms, or ideas:

1. Are assumptions and sources of uncertainties clearly identified and quantified in the Study Team (2012) Workshop report?
2. Given known (and unknown) levels of uncertainty, are the revised demographic criteria likely to support long-term conservation of grizzly bears in the GYA?
3. Would additional analyses or research reduce sources of uncertainty and to what extent? If so, what analyses/research would be most helpful?
4. Do you believe that managing for stability (instead of an increasing or decreasing population) an appropriate approach for this population of grizzly bears?

5. Is assessment of demographic criteria exclusively within the Monitoring Area identified a reasonable biological and statistical approach?
6. Do the proposed revisions and supporting documents provide all the necessary and pertinent literature to support our assumptions and conclusions?

Expectations & Outcomes

As a peer reviewer, you are asked to provide a brief written report evaluating the documents. This report would include a brief description of your organizational affiliation, credentials before responding to the questions above and describing your findings and conclusions. Reviewers are not expected to provide advice on the specific decision but rather ensure that scientific uncertainties are clearly identified and whether more research is likely to decrease key uncertainties and, if so, to what extent. If you accept this responsibility, your name and reviews will be available to the public.