

# **Grizzly bear recovery and delisting in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem**

A summary of the proposed rule to delist the GYE grizzly bear population

# Summary of the proposed action

- **We (US Fish & Wildlife Service) are proposing to delist the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) population of grizzly bears.**
- **Upon delisting, as per the delisting rule, the population will be managed under a comprehensive management plan called the 2016 Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy by a joint committee including the States of Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, the Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the Eastern Shoshone, Northern Arapahoe, and Shoshone Bannock Tribes.**
- **Concurrent with this proposed delisting rule we released drafts of the 2016 Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy and the Recovery Plan Supplement: Revised Demographic Criteria for public comment and peer review.**

# **Public comments requested**

- **We are requesting public comments on 3 documents:**
  - **The proposed delisting rule**
  - **The draft 2016 Conservation Strategy**
  - **The draft supplement to the Recovery Plan proposed revised demographic recovery criteria**
- **Directions on how to comment online or in writing are detailed in the proposed delisting rule which can be found at:**  
**<http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/es/grizzlyBear.php>**

# What is the objective?

- **To get the GYE grizzly bear population recovered and delisted as per the direction of the Endangered Species Act.**
- **This requires a biologically and legally defensible proposed delisting rule and Conservation Strategy.**

# **Why delist the Yellowstone grizzly bear?**

- **The purpose of the Endangered Species Act (Act) is to get listed species to the point at which protection under the Act is no longer required.**
- **Recovery goals for the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) have been met since 2004.**
- **The GYE grizzly bear population is healthy and has been essentially stable from 2002 to 2015.**
- **Cooperative efforts by state, federal, and tribal agencies and the support of the public have resulted in a healthy grizzly population.**
- **The above factors have brought the GYE grizzly bear population to the point where a change in status is appropriate as per the intent of the Act.**

# Conservation Reliant Species

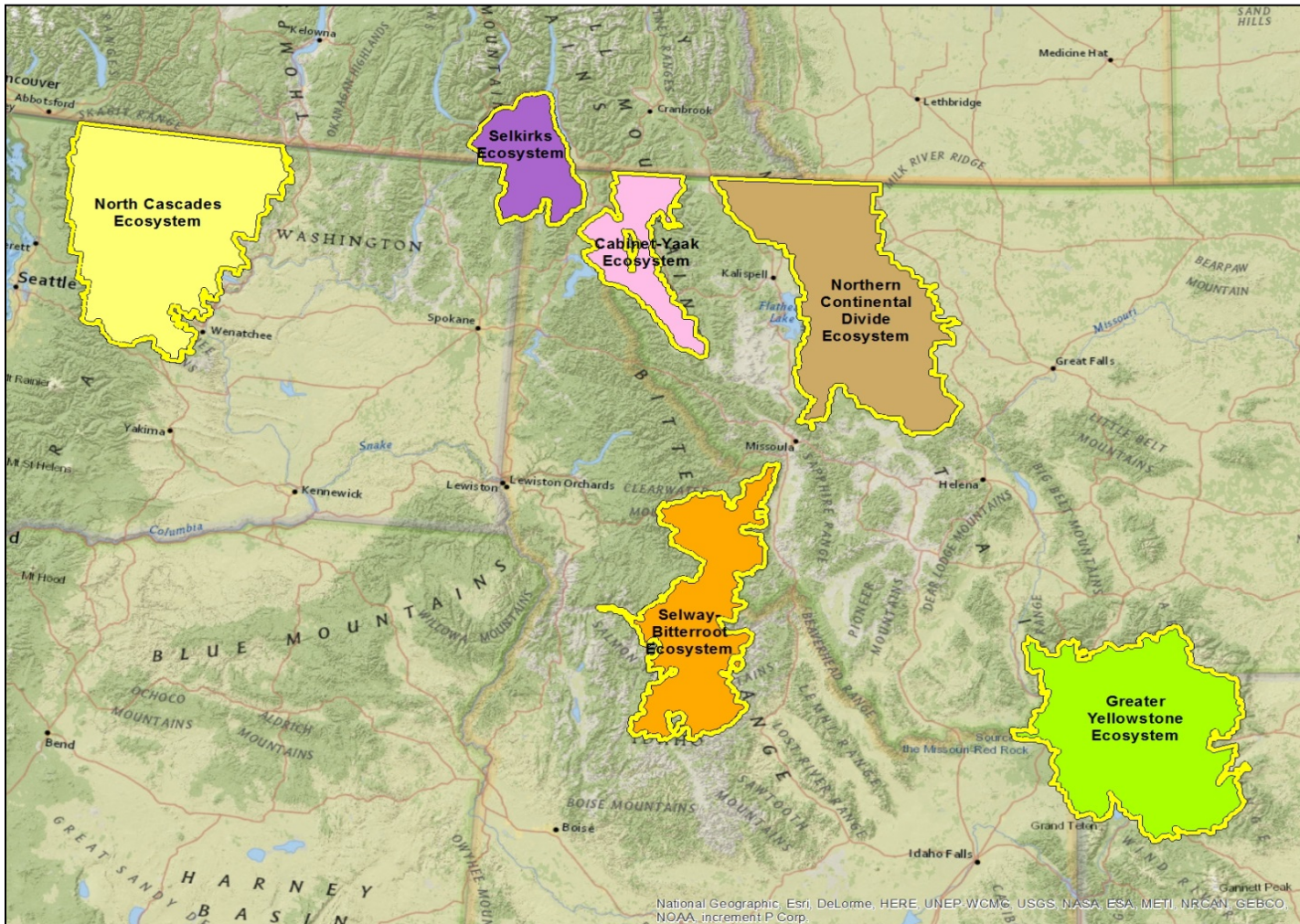
- Grizzly bears are a “conservation reliant species<sup>1</sup>”.
- A conservation reliant species is defined as: “Species that can maintain a self-sustaining population in the wild only if **ongoing management actions of proven effectiveness** are implemented”.
- This is not unusual. Most valued animal species (e.g. moose, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, trout, salmon, rhinos, etc.) are dependent upon ongoing conservation management.
- The Conservation Strategy should provide the **ongoing management actions of proven effectiveness** to maintain a recovered GYE grizzly population.

<sup>1</sup>Scott, J. M., D. D. Goble, J. A. Wiens, D. S. Wilcove, M. Bean, and T. Male. 2005. Recovery of imperiled species under the Endangered Species Act: the need for a new approach. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 3:383-389.

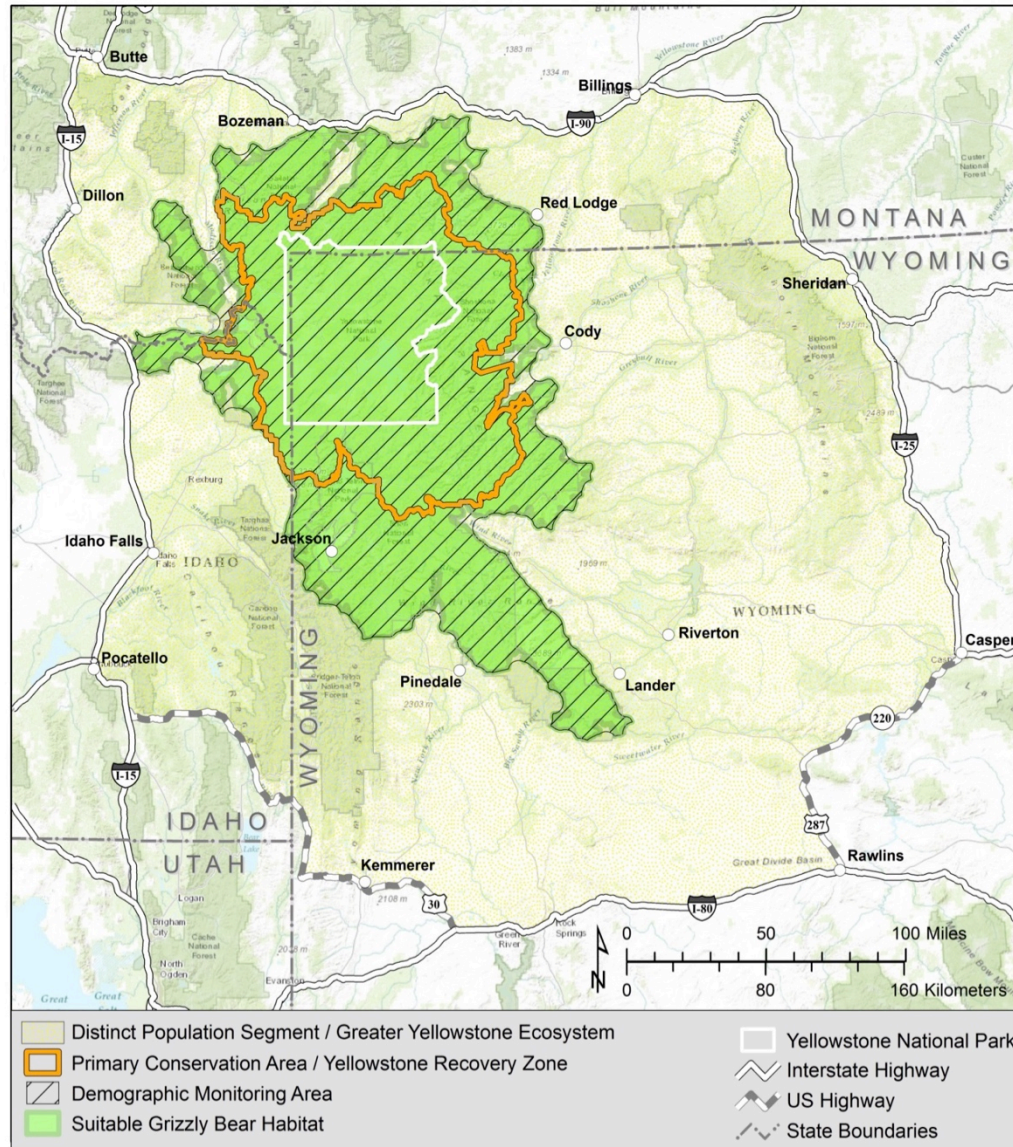
# **What is the purpose of the Conservation Strategy?**

- **The Conservation Strategy is the post-delisting interagency management plan that will be in place in perpetuity to guide and direct habitat and population management in order to maintain a recovered GYE grizzly population.**
- **The Conservation Strategy goes into effect upon delisting and will guide and direct management in perpetuity.**

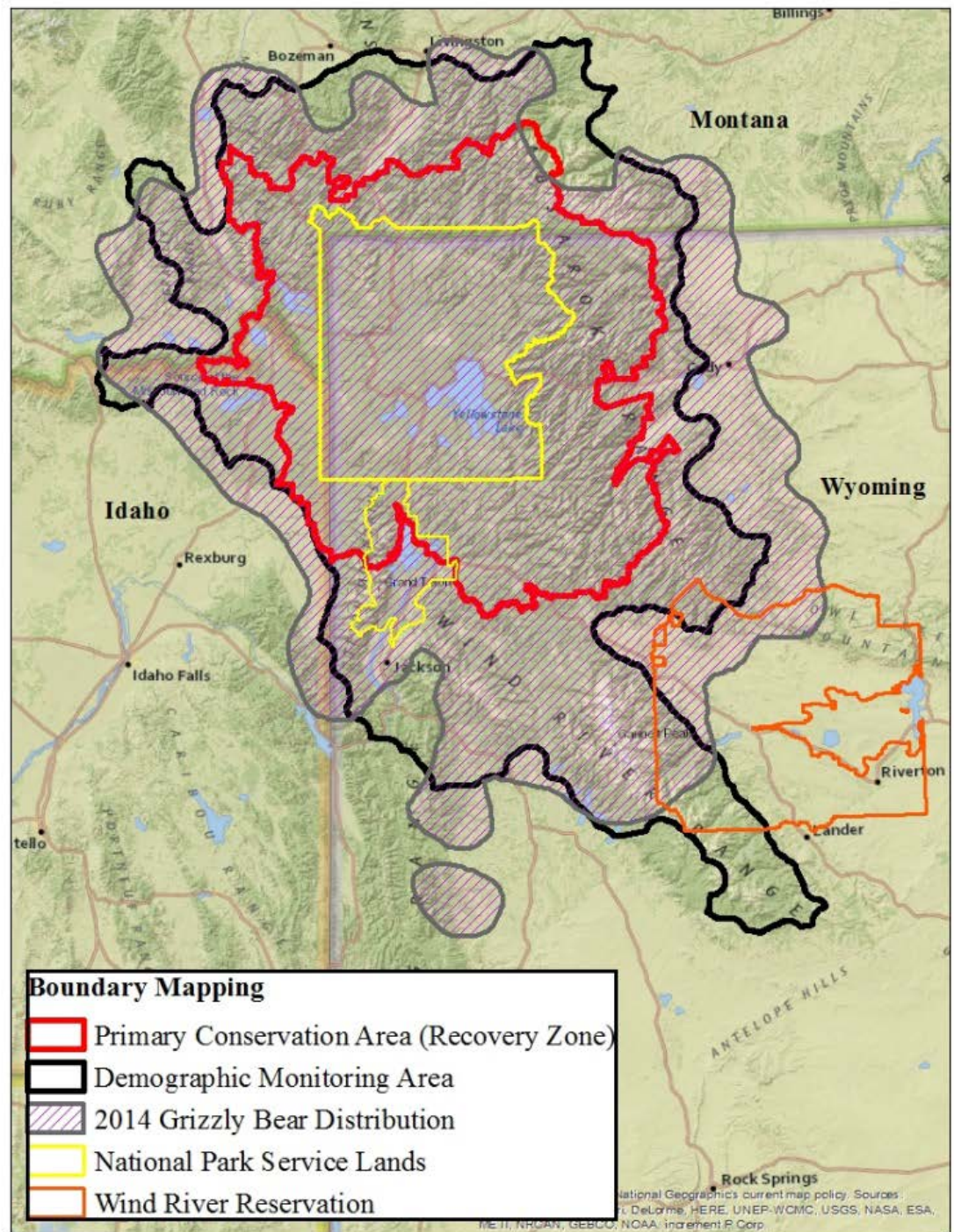
**The grizzly recovery zones. This proposed delisting action only will effect the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. All other grizzly populations will remain listed as threatened.**



# The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem boundaries



# Grizzly bear distribution in the GYE as of 2014.



# **Will the Yellowstone grizzly bear still be protected?**

- **Yes. There will continue to be strict limits on total mortality from all causes inside the DMA, state laws against illegal killing, and strong habitat protections on federal lands in the 9,200 sq. mi. primary conservation area where approximately 75% of females with cubs live for most of the year.**
- **MANAGEMENT DECISIONS WILL BE GUIDED BY REGULATORY MECHANISMS INCLUDING:**
  - **THE CONSERVATION STRATEGY**
  - **NATIONAL PARK SERVICE MANAGEMENT PLANS**
  - **USFS FOREST PLAN AMENDMENTS**
  - **STATE GRIZZLY BEAR MANAGEMENT PLANS**
  - **OVER 70 STATE AND FEDERAL LAWS, STATUTES, AND REGULATIONS**

# **What habitat protections will there be INSIDE the primary conservation area (PCA)?**

- **Within the 9,200 sq. mi. primary conservation area (PCA), where approximately 75% of females with cubs live for much of the year, there will be:**
  - **No increase in number or capacity of livestock allotments**
  - **No reductions in secure habitat**
  - **No permanent increases in road densities**
  - **No increase in the number of developed sites**

# **What habitat protections will be in place for suitable habitat OUTSIDE of the PCA?**

- **The Forest Service will manage the vast majority of suitable habitat outside the PCA (4.2 million acres).**
- **Of this 4.2 million acres, 80% (3.3 million acres) is Designated Wilderness Area, Wilderness Study Area, or Inventoried Roadless Area. These designations provide regulatory mechanisms that protect grizzly bear habitat from increases in motorized use, oil & gas development, livestock allotments, and timber harvest.**
- **As a result, 71% (3 million acres) of suitable habitat outside the PCA on Forest Service lands is long-term secure habitat.**
- **Food storage regulations are being extended to include most suitable habitat in the GYE.**
- **The Forest Service will incorporate guidance from the Conservation Strategy for minimizing grizzly bear-human and grizzly bear-livestock conflicts and maintaining key grizzly bear foods both inside the PCA and in suitable habitats outside the PCA.**

# **What is the YGCC?**

- **The Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Coordinating Committee (YGCC) is the management committee that will replace the Yellowstone Ecosystem Subcommittee (YES) upon delisting.**
- **The YGCC is composed of representatives from Federal, State, Local, and Tribal agencies.**
- **The YGCC will continue in place to implement the details of the Conservation Strategy in perpetuity since grizzly bears are a conservation reliant species and will require careful and coordinated management to remain recovered.**
- **The YGCC is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Conservation Strategy, which includes:**
  - **Ensuring that population and habitat data are collected and evaluated annually to assess the status of the population.**
  - **Identifying management, research, and financial needs.**
  - **Coordinating information and education efforts.**

# **What types of mortalities count against the total mortality limits inside the DMA?**

- **Total mortality includes documented known and probable grizzly bear mortalities from all causes including but not limited to:**
  - Management removals
  - Illegal kills
  - Mistaken identity kills
  - Self-defense kills
  - Vehicle kills
  - Natural mortalities
  - Undetermined-cause mortalities
  - Grizzly bear hunting
  - A statistical estimate by the IGBST of the number of unknown/unreported mortalities

# **How will the population be managed post-delisting?**

**As stated in the proposed delisting rule:**

- Maintain the GYE grizzly bear population at the average population estimate for 2002–2014 of 674.**
- The population inside the GYE demographic monitoring area will be estimated annually by the IGBST using the model-averaged Chao2 method.**
- The States will meet each January to review the population monitoring data supplied by the IGBST and collectively establish discretionary mortality inside the DMA outside of National Parks within the total mortality limits per each age/sex class available for each jurisdiction (MT, ID, WY).**

# **Will there be a hunting season for grizzly bears?**

- **The states have stated their intention to classify grizzly bears as a game species in the States of Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho outside of the National Parks and the Wind River Reservation.**
- **There may be a limited hunting season if the states decide to have a hunting season, however:**
  - **Any hunting mortalities must be within the total mortality limits inside the DMA detailed in the proposed rule.**
  - **Grizzly bears cannot be killed out of season or without a hunting license.**
  - **All hunting mortalities must be reported.**
  - **Poachers will be prosecuted under State laws.**
- **The proposed rule sets out the necessary State regulations that must be in place prior to a final rule to delist.**
- **Mortalities outside of the DMA will not count against total mortality limits inside the DMA.**

# **What State regulations are necessary inside the DMA before any final rule to delist?**

**As stated in the proposed delisting rule, these state regulations must be in place prior to delisting:**

- All discretionary mortality (except if required for human safety) inside the DMA will be suspended if the population estimate falls below 600.**
- Grizzly bear hunting inside the DMA will be suspended in that state if total mortality limits for any age/sex class are met inside that state at any time during the year.**
- Any mortality exceeding total mortality limits for any sex/age class in any year will be subtracted from that age/sex class total mortality limit for the following year.**
- Female grizzly bears with young are protected from hunter harvest.**

# **What population parameters will be monitored?**

- **Goal: maintain the GYE grizzly bear population at the average population estimate for 2002–2014 of 674.**
- **To achieve this goal, within the GYE demographic monitoring area (DMA) the IGBST will monitor:**
  - **The number of females with cubs**
  - **Distribution of females with cubs**
  - **Survival rates for all sex/age classes**
  - **All sources of mortality**
  - **Population trend**
  - **Cub production**
  - **Movements in relation to any changes in foods**
  - **Spatial distribution of grizzly bear-human conflicts**

**As stated in the proposed delisting rule, example calculations of expected number of independent female and male bears available for discretionary (hunting) allocation inside the DMA at estimated population sizes of 674 and 717.**

|                                                                                 | Estimated population size |                   |                            |                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|
|                                                                                 | 674 (the population goal) |                   | 717 (2015 population size) |                   |
|                                                                                 | Independent Females       | Independent Males | Independent Females        | Independent Males |
| Size of sex/age cohort at this population size                                  | 236                       | 236               | 251                        | 251               |
| Total allowable mortality rates                                                 | 7.6%                      | 15%               | 9%                         | 20%               |
| Total allowable mortality numbers                                               | 18                        | 35                | 23                         | 50                |
| Average non-grizzly hunting background mortality from 2012–2015, inside the DMA | 15                        | 22                | 15                         | 22                |
| <b>Bears available for discretionary (hunting) mortality in all 3 states</b>    | <b>3</b>                  | <b>13</b>         | <b>8</b>                   | <b>28</b>         |

- Background mortality: mortalities that occur every year due to causes other than hunting, including management removals, illegal kills, self-defense, calculated unknown/unreported mortalities, natural mortalities, and other causes such as vehicle collisions.
- Inside the DMA, expected background mortality is calculated by taking the average number of mortalities from the most recent 4-year period from all sources other than grizzly bear hunting. Because background mortality levels vary from year to year, averaging these over several years is a reasonable predictor of these numbers.
- **As stated in the proposed delisting rule, within these mortality limits, state fish and wildlife agencies have discretion to determine whether they intend to propose a grizzly bear hunting season and/or how much discretionary mortality (within allowable limits) to allocate to hunting.**

# **Under what circumstances could GYE grizzly bears be relisted?**

- **As stated in the proposed delisting rule, the Service may initiate a formal status review and could emergency relist (within 2 weeks) the GYE grizzly bear population until a formal status review is complete if any of these conditions exist:**
  - **There are any changes in Federal, State, or Tribal laws, rules, regulations, or management plans that depart significantly from the specifics of population or habitat management detailed in the proposed rule and this increases the threat to the population.**
  - **The population falls below 500 in any year using the model-averaged Chao2 method or counts of females with cubs fall below 48 for 3 consecutive years.**
  - **Independent female total mortality limits as per Tables 1, 2, and 3, in the proposed rule, are exceeded for 3 consecutive years and the population is fewer than 600.**
  - **Fewer than 16 of 18 bear management units are occupied by females with young for 3 consecutive 6-year sums of observations.**

# **Public comments requested**

- **We are requesting public comments on the 3 documents:**
  - **The proposed delisting rule**
  - **The draft 2016 Conservation Strategy**
  - **The draft supplement to the Recovery Plan proposed revised demographic recovery criteria**
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# **Scientific peer review will also occur**

- **A scientific peer review of the 3 documents will also occur. The organization of the peer review is contracted out to a non-government contractor who will select 3-5 peer reviewers and submit the reviews to the FWS at the end of the comment period. FWS and DOI have no input into the selection of peer reviewers. The peer reviews will become part of the record along with all the public comments received.**
- **When the public comment and peer review comment period is complete, FWS will consider the comments, make appropriate changes to the 3 documents based on comments received, and make a decision on whether to proceed with delisting or not. This decision will likely come in late fall or winter of 2016-17.**