



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Mountain-Prairie Region



Field Code Changed

IN REPLY REFER TO:

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It's always "The Honorable"

CONGRESSIONAL LETTER

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The Honorable ~~Scott Tipton~~ Raúl M. Grijalva
Committee on Natural Resources
House of Representatives
218 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

All Congressional letters must be routed through External Affairs.

If the incoming is addressed to someone other than the person signing the response, you should explain this in the opening paragraph.

Dear Representative ~~Tipton~~ Grijalva:

:

Thank you for your letter of ~~March 14~~ June 7, 2016, concerning ~~a programmatic biological opinion (PBO) for the White River basin under the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program (Recovery Program)~~ the proposed rule to delist grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE). Director Ashe requested that I respond to your inquiry. Specifically, your letter encouraged the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) not to publish a final rule to delist the GYE grizzly bear until federal land managers and state wildlife officials have plans in place that exhibit adequate regulatory mechanisms to conserve grizzly bear habitat, allow for connectivity between the GYE and other populations, and limit mortality to sustainable levels-initiate and complete a PBO for the White River in the most expeditious manner possible.

As stated in the The proposed rule to delist the GYE population of grizzly bears, states that the revised state plans will be made available for public review and comment. We intend to fully evaluate all aspects of the plans, including whether they effectively provide for the conservation of grizzly bears and their habitat, prior to and finalized prior to a final determination on the proposed delisting rule. Sustainable mortality limits are addressed in the proposed rule and are part of the requirements for the states to adopt in their management plans and regulations prior to the Service issuing a final rule. Grizzly bears outside of the GYE area delineated in the proposed rule, including areas that provide potential connectivity to other populations, would remain listed should we finalize the delisting of the GYE population. In addition, the proposed rule states that the Forest Service and National Park Service will incorporate the habitat standards and criteria into their Forest Plans and National Park management plans and/or Superintendent's compendia prior to the issuance of a final rule.

The Recovery Program is working to recover endangered fish in the Upper Colorado River Basin while water and hydropower resources are managed within state and federal laws and tribal rights to meet the needs of people in growing western communities. PBOs are proven tools to provide localized, drainage-

The Honorable ~~Scott Tipton~~ Raúl M. Grijalva

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specific application of the Recovery Program's goal to recover the endangered fish while water use and development continue. PBOs expedite compliance with the Endangered Species Act for water users, federal agencies, and the Service. The Service has strongly committed to developing a PBO for the White River. The process begins with the development of a White River Management Plan (WRMP), which will:

1. Recognize historical water development and some amount of future water depletion that the Recovery Program can cover from an Endangered Species Act perspective.
2. Identify specific Recovery Program actions (e.g. finalization of endangered fish flow recommendations for the White River) that will offset the effects of those depletions.

The WRMP requires hydrologic modeling to determine how the flow needs of the endangered fish and some level of future water development compare to the current range of flows in the White River. Hydrologic modeling will be conducted by the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB), but has been deferred while CWCB developed Colorado's Water Plan. ~~With the completion of the Water Plan, the Service believes CWCB has indicated that the development of a White River Management Plan, WRMP, and the and PBO should be completed by are scheduled for the summer of 2018.~~

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~~The WRMP dManagement Plan Development will be is a stakeholder driven; process and we look forward to open engagement throughout that process. With completion of the WRMP in 2017, the Service believes the PBO will be completed in 2018, as that plan is developed.~~

Thank you for this opportunity to communicate our proposed process, ~~schedule,~~ and commitment to develop a PBO for the White River ~~the delisting of the GYE grizzly bear.~~ I hope this letter fully addresses your concerns. If you need further information, please contact me at (303) 236-7920 or Michael Thabault, the Assistant Regional Director for Ecological Services in the Mountain-Prairie Region, at (303) 236-4210.

Sincerely,

Regional Director

~~Any letters for RD signature that are addressed to a State Director, Senator, Tribal or member of Congress should include the above contact information in the last paragraph.~~

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