

Region 6 Cooperative Recovery Initiative Pre-proposal

Species' Name: Grizzly Bear (Ursus arctos horribilis)

National Wildlife Refuge: Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

Listed status (T, E): Threatened

Regional Priority Species? (Y/N): Yes

Priority Landscape? (Y/N): Yes, Sage Steppe

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Project Description:

Grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) are one of our nation's most iconic wildlife species. Grizzlies are fierce, independent, and resilient. Decades of recovery work have helped grizzly bear populations substantially rebound in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE). The estimated GYE grizzly bear populations increased from 136 in 1975 to between 674 and 839 in 2014, and the grizzly bear occupied habitat has expanded by more than 50% (YNP Website). As the number of grizzly bears increases and nears carrying capacity, grizzly bears are exploring new habitat in adjacent landscapes. Expansions of bears into new landscapes brings new challenges for bears and communities.

The long-term survival of grizzly bears largely depends on how well humans except bears and limit conflicts with bears and human-caused mortality to grizzlies. Human related mortalities are the number one cause of death for grizzly bears in the GYE. In 2014, of the known 28 Grizzly bear mortalities in the GYE, 19 (68%) were human related (IGBST 2014) . Reducing grizzly bear-human conflicts (damaging property, obtaining anthropogenic foods, and livestock depredation) is critical to the long-term persistence of grizzly bears. The ultimately challenge of recovering, delisting, and living with grizzly bears in the GYE requires an approach that balances grizzly bear conservation and other values where grizzly bear conflicts and mortality repeatedly occur.

The Centennial Valley (CV) is one of wildest and intact landscapes in the contiguous United States. The CV lies on the northwest border of the GYE and serves as a corridor between the GYE and the High Divide to the west. In the center if the CV is the Red Rocks Lake National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) which includes 51,386 acres and also manages 23,806 acres of conservation easements on private lands. In the CV, partnerships have helped to conserve self-sustaining populations of fish and wildlife, in the context of landscape and system sustainability between the refuge, private lands and surrounding public lands. The Refuge and adjacent private and public lands include high mountain, wetland-riparian and sage steppe habitats that provide a diversity of habitat for many species including, including the trumpeter swan, white-faced ibis, and black-crowned night herons, sandhill cranes, long-billed curlews, peregrine falcons, eagles, hawks, moose, badgers, wolves, black and grizzly bears, elk, pronghorns and native fish such as Arctic grayling and westslope cutthroat trout. The sage steppe in the CV includes the southwest Montana sage grouse Priority Area of Conservation (PAC). The sage steppe habitat is frequented

by grizzly bears and provides important connectivity between forested habitat and mountain ranges and has riparian zones that are important for grizzly bear foraging and cover. In addition to the Refuge, the CV is a Partners for Fish and Wildlife focus area, has an active watershed group that has recently established a Range Riding Program and is a Nature Conservancy priority landscape.

Strategy:

This proposal focuses on using the US Fish and Wildlife Services' (FWS) Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) approach to: 1) prioritize private lands in area surrounding Red Rock Lakes NWR for conflict abatement projects using grizzly bear occurrence and grizzly bear-human conflict data, 2) deliver on-the-ground conflict abatement projects such as range rider/livestock and bear monitoring, bear resistant containers, carcass pickup, composting, electric fencing , and others to be identified , 3) deliver on-the-ground riparian restoration projects that improve travel corridors and foraging and cover habitat 4) support Southwest Montana Bear Safety Education Program to increase human safety and reduce human-bear conflict in Southwest Montana through contact with visitors, recreationists and residents and 5) evaluate and monitor project performance by comparing conflicts and mortalities before, during, and after project implementation in the treatment areas. Addressing grizzly bear recovery on private lands and the associated threats posed by people living, working, and recreating therein are of critical importance for conservation efforts over the long-term.

Benefits of the Project:

The outcomes of the work we propose can serve as a model for conserving and living with wildlife. We anticipate that benefits to grizzly bears will include: reduced conflicts and mortalities within project area and improved riparian habitats in the sage steppe. Long-term trend data on conflicts, mortalities and populations will be tracked to analyze the benefits of the project. Additional benefits will be protecting human safety and property, educating publics about grizzly bears, and improving social acceptance of grizzly bears. Misinformation and opposition to grizzly bears can result in direct killing, refusal to adopt coexistence practices, and anti-bear activism in the political arena. Building support with people who actually live and recreate with grizzly bears is critical for establishing a strong, grassroots constituency that supports overarching national goals for threatened and endangered species recovery.

Has this action been recommended in recent Service documents (recovery plans, CCPs, HMPs)?: Yes. **Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan, Red Rock NWR CCP**

Participating Programs: **USFWS:** Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge – Bill West
Montana Ecological Field Office- Chris Servheen

Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program: Jim Magee, Greg Neudecker

Other Potential Partners include the Centennial Valley Association, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Bureau of Land Management, The US Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, Wildlife Conservation Society, Wildlife Management Institute, People and Carnivores.

Literature Cited:

Yellowstone National Park Grizzly Bear Information Website:

<http://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/nature/gbearinfo.htm>

Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team. 2014 Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Investigation 2014.

Website: <http://www.nrmssc.usgs.gov/products/IGBST>

Wildlife Conservation Society August 2015 Presentation:

Identifying Human-Wildlife Conflict Resolution Needs and Role of Coordination in Increasing Effectiveness in SW MT & SE ID Prepared by Kris Inman, WCS Community Partnerships

Program August 2015

Preliminary Cost Estimate:

Item Description	Program	Sub-Item Description	Funding Requested 2016	Funding Requested 2017	Funding Requested 2018
Prioritization	MT ES	Grizzly Bear Program	\$30,000		
Conflict Abatement	MT PFW	On-the-ground practices	\$80,000		
Conflict Abatement	Red Rock Lakes NWR	Ranger Rider Program	\$15,000	\$15,000	
Habitat Restoration	MT PFW	On-the-ground Riparian Rest.	\$100,000		
Monitoring	MT ES	Grizzly Bear Program			\$45,000
Education		SW Montana Bear Safety Education Program	20,000	20,000	
TOTAL			\$245,000	\$35,000	\$45,000