

From: [Will Meeks](#)
To: [Noreen Walsh](#)
Cc: [Matt Hogan](#)
Subject: Fwd: Another Grizz Article
Date: Tuesday, November 03, 2015 11:53:23 AM

I asked Ryan about this. It was complete and hour before I told him no new requests. He used the same quote as before. Servheen is in this too.

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Begin forwarded message:

From: Ryan Moehring <ryan_moehring@fws.gov>
Date: November 3, 2015 at 11:44:33 AM MST
To: Will Meeks <will_meeks@fws.gov>
Subject: Another Grizz Article

ENDANGERED SPECIES:

Study could support delisting of Yellowstone grizzlies

[Phil Taylor](#), E&E reporter

Published: Tuesday, November 3, 2015

Grizzly bear numbers have risen significantly in the Yellowstone National Park region since the 1980s and are approaching levels that would ensure long-term genetic health, according to a new study funded by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The research by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team (IGBST) is part of a growing body of evidence that the Yellowstone bears are "very healthy and recovered," said Chris Servheen, the agency's grizzly bear recovery coordinator based in Missoula, Mont.

The [study](#) comes as a panel of federal, state and local grizzly experts meet in Jackson, Wyo., this week to discuss whether grizzlies in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem can be removed from the list of threatened species.

"This work will also help to inform our decision on whether to propose to delist the Yellowstone grizzly population," Servheen said.

The study published in *Molecular Ecology* found that the "effective population size" of grizzlies, which refers to the number of bears that are producing cubs, increased from 100 to 450 between 1982 and 2007, all while experiencing no significant loss in genetic diversity.

Those numbers are below the estimated 750 bears in the Yellowstone region, which includes parts of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho, because not all animals in the population breed,

researchers said.

The study was led by scientists at the U.S. Geological Survey, Wildlife Genetics International, the University of Montana, and federal, state and tribal partners of the IGBST.

It looked as tissue, blood and hair samples collected from several hundred grizzlies born between 1962 and 2010 that had either been captured or died. It recorded the bears' genetic profile, looking at markers on their DNA that have variability.

While the genetic diversity of Yellowstone-area bears is among the lowest for brown bears in North America, due to their geographic isolation, genetic variety was stable and inbreeding was low during the study time period, researchers found.

Four decades of ESA protections have "thus far aided the recovery of this population," according to the IGBST study.

"Our findings suggest that genetic diversity has shown no decline in recent decades," study authors concluded. The effective population size is "sufficiently large" to avoid inbreeding, which is a positive sign for the species' long-term survival, they wrote.

"This is a key genetic indicator of a population's ability to respond to future environmental change," said Pauline Kamath, USGS ecologist and lead author of the study.

But David Mattson, a former USGS scientist who served on the IGBST for 17 years, said the results of the study are "implausible" and assume Yellowstone bears reproduced "like rabbits."

"For this to happen, population growth rates would have needed to exceed anything known, or even possible, for grizzly bears, and the resulting putative size of the population would be far in excess of even the most optimistic current estimates," Mattson said.

He accused the researchers of having an "agenda" of removing ESA protections for grizzlies and of maintaining a "monopoly" on Yellowstone-area data.

"The extent to which the IGBST and its primary funders have fought to maintain a monopoly can only invite suspicion, especially in instances such as this one where some of the results defy logic and any other available evidence," Mattson wrote in a [rebuttal](#) to the study.

In the early 1800s, grizzlies were estimated to number 50,000 and stretched from Mexico to Canada and from the Pacific Coast to the Great Plains. But as millions of settlers moved west and built towns and cities, all but six of the 37 grizzly populations in 1922 were extirpated by 1975.

By the mid-1970s, there were 136 grizzlies in the Yellowstone population.

Today, the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem population is between 674 and 839, and there's a second significant population in the Continental Divide region around Glacier National Park, where bears number roughly 1,000.

Fish and Wildlife delisted the Yellowstone grizzlies in 2007, but the U.S. District Court for the District of Montana reversed the decision in 2009, finding that government regulations were not protective enough and that the agency had not fully considered threats posed by the decline of whitebark pine, a key food source for the bears.

That decision was appealed to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which in November 2011 upheld the lower court's judgment on whitebark pine, while ruling that existing regulations were adequate ([E&ENews PM](#), Nov. 22, 2011).

Two years later, a report by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, which consists of federal and state wildlife and land management officials, found that grizzly bears will adapt and thrive despite the collapse of whitebark pine in the Yellowstone ecosystem ([E&ENews PM](#), Dec. 11, 2013).

FWS Director Dan Ashe at the time said it was likely his agency would propose a new delisting rule.

A final decision will be made in the next several months, said FWS spokesman Ryan Moehring. It would only effect the Yellowstone bears, which are genetically and geographically distinct from other bears in the northern Rocky Mountains.

"Discussions with states, tribes and partner agencies are ongoing, allowing us to consider partner input and to ensure that the population would remain viable and recovered in the absence of ESA protections," he said. "Delisting would only occur if there is a very high level of confidence that the population will remain recovered and never again need ESA protections."

The Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee voted unanimously in late 2013 to recommend FWS delist Yellowstone grizzlies. The agency is also under pressure from Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead (R) and local governments including Park County, Wyo., to delist, which would allow state-sanctioned trophy hunts.

The issue has split wildlife advocates.

Tom France, who is regional director for the National Wildlife Federation in Missoula, said his group believes Yellowstone bears are adapting well to changing environments and are ready to be delisted.

"This is a very healthy population," he said. "It's a great conservation success story."

Other groups, including the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, are focused on reducing human-bear conflicts and enhancing genetic connectivity with bears in northern Montana.

But Louisa Willcox, who has advocated for grizzly recovery for multiple environmental groups and is married to former USGS scientist Mattson, said Yellowstone grizzlies have been dying at an "alarming rate," which calls into question the wisdom of delisting them.

A total of 52 grizzlies have been killed in 2015, which is roughly double the number over the previous two years, but about level with the rate observed from 2010 to 2012, according to the IGBST [database](#).

The increased mortality -- which largely is a result of conflicts with humans, such as vehicle collisions, cattle depredations and habituation to human food sources -- is due to climate-driven loss of key foods, including whitebark pine and trout, not population growth, Willcox said.

The federal government believes higher densities of bears result in more conflicts and necessitates a delisting, which would allow state-sanctioned trophy hunts and "more liberalized killing," Willcox said.

"Problem is that there are not more bears since 2002," she said. "And the trend is downward, according to federal data."

<http://www.eenews.net/greenwire/2015/11/03/stories/1060027372>

Thanks,
-Ryan

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