

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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GRIZZLY BEAR LISTED AS THREATENED SPECIES

The grizzly bear has been listed as a threatened species in the lower 48 States by Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director, announced today.

A rulemaking to this effect was published in the Federal Register on July 28.

The action means that the grizzly bear, an aggressive animal that is highly intolerant of man, now receives Federal protection under the Endangered Species Act. Except for limited circumstances prescribed by regulation, it is now unlawful to kill, capture, harm, harass, import, or export a grizzly bear anywhere in the lower 48 States, or to sell any parts or products of grizzlies in interstate or foreign commerce.

Although the grizzly population has remained fairly stable for the last 50 years, increasing human activity such as road building and developments that affect the grizzly's remaining habitat prompted its listing as a threatened species.

Today there are several hundred grizzlies in the United States south of Canada, and their range has been reduced to the point where virtually all occur in three relatively small ecosystems: The Selway-Bitterroot in Idaho and Montana; the Yellowstone covering parts of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming; and the Bob Marshall in Montana. Most of these ecosystems are composed of Federal lands.

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The most critical factor in the grizzly's past decline has been direct conflict with humans. More than any other North American mammal, the grizzly requires large tracts of undisturbed wilderness. The bears live in isolated pockets of suitable habitat, generally wild country; areas just big enough to provide the prey animals and vegetation their omnivorous diet requires. Each pocket can support only a certain number of grizzlies. And any above that number (the surplus) will usually turn to other food sources. The bears, which can stand eight feet and weigh 800 pounds, have been known to attack cattle, sheep, and other livestock under certain conditions. When grizzlies lose their fear of man, people-bear confrontations and conflicts are inevitable.

The rulemaking would permit grizzlies to be taken anywhere in the lower 48 when they pose a serious threat to humans. Authorized Federal or State officers could take bears when necessary to prevent significant depredation on lawfully present livestock. They may also be pursued, captured, collected, or removed by Federal or State officials for scientific or research purposes.

In northwestern Montana where bears are more numerous, sport hunting of the bears may continue if the total number of bears killed for all purposes in a given year does not exceed 25. This figure is about five less than have been killed annually for the past seven years. This quota will apply to the entire area of Montana west of U.S. Highway 91 and north of U.S. Highway 12, including the Bob Marshall ecosystem.

Permitting a small number of grizzlies to be hunted each year keeps such livestock depredations and human confrontations at a minimum. It is essential for the continual survival of the grizzly bear species that it maintain its fear of man and thus its distance from man and never become accustomed to human activity. Because of their range size, aggressive nature, and remote location nuisance bears are often difficult to remove or transplant to other locations.

The listing of the grizzly bear as a threatened species comes after a complete review of the bear's status which was initiated in March 1974. The grizzly population in Alaska, thought to be about 12,000 individuals, is not considered to be threatened at this time.

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NOTE: Prints of the attached photo of the grizzly bear are available to editors. (call 202/343-5211)

