February 18, 2022

Ms. Deb Haaland  
United States Secretary of Interior

Mr. Charles F. Sams  
Director National Park Service

Ms. Martha Williams  
Director US Fish & Wildlife Service

RE: North Cascades Grizzly Bear Recovery

Dear Secretary Haaland, Director Sams, and Director Williams,

The following organizations and former agency staff with extensive personal and professional investment in this issue wish to emphasize our unequivocal support for the resumption and completion of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) that is intended to involve the public in the decision on how to restore grizzly bears to the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone.

We trust that your administration will recognize the importance of this initiative and include it as one of your priorities for immediate action – to support the formal agency-driven recovery process, completion of the FEIS, and issuance of a Record of Decision (RoD) that respects the requirements of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) under direction of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The EIS that federal agencies initiated in 2015 was derailed two years ago without transparency or any credible explanation. Former Secretary Bernhardt’s decision to terminate the process contradicted the intentions he put forth in his own confirmation hearings that promised a finalization of the EIS. The administration did not solicit input from, nor provide advanced notice to local or regional staff who were charged with completing the FEIS and RoD.

The North Cascades Ecosystem (NCE) is one of only six Grizzly Bear Recovery Zones (GBRZ) in four states identified by federal agencies as contributing to the national grizzly bear recovery strategy and subsequent delisting from the ESA. The North Cascades is the only GBRZ outside of the Rocky Mountains and is one of two GBRZs with no known population of grizzly bears. As one of the most intact wildlands in the contiguous US, the NCE is critical for meeting the minimum ESA standard of a well-distributed population of bears as a measure of recovery.
For perspective, even if all six GBRZs were restored to scientifically defensible levels of grizzly bear numbers, those populations, most of which are still disconnected from each other, would represent only about 3% of historic grizzly bear range in the contiguous US.

Federal agencies held more than 100 informational open houses, ad hoc meetings, private briefings and webinars for the public, stakeholders, elected officials, and tribal governments over a three-year public comment period. Federal and state agencies invested significant resources over nearly four decades in scientific research, public outreach, safety and habitat security in preparation for the EIS process, which by any measure was thorough, professional and in accordance with NEPA.

Despite the premature termination of the FEIS, the process revealed overwhelming public support (over 85%) for grizzly bear restoration in the North Cascades – as documented by the public comments obtained under a Freedom of Information Act request.

To alleviate concerns about potential conflict between bears and agricultural interests, we look forward to working with federal agencies on any plans to promulgate a rule under Section 10(j) of the ESA that would provide local involvement and flexibility to manage conflicts while still protecting the grizzly population.

Fortunately, communities in the Rocky Mountains and elsewhere have demonstrated how humans can live successfully alongside grizzly bears, utilizing the many effective nonlethal tools to prevent conflicts between people and bears. Thanks to the work of state and federal agencies, Tribes, businesses, and nonprofits, many people across the North Cascades are already using bear-resistant trash cans, electric fences, and other tools to coexist with grizzlies and other wildlife.

Our North Cascades stage is set for one of the biggest conservation success stories in the region and the country – to restore the iconic grizzly bear to the Pacific Northwest and all that it means for indigenous cultures, our region’s conservation ethic and for the ecology of our wildlands.

And as you know, for added perspective, First Nations on the British Columbia (BC) side of the border have initiated a collaborative process with the BC government and environmental NGOs intended to restore grizzly bears to the North Cascades and nearby areas in BC where they are threatened. It would be advantageous for our two countries to work collaboratively to achieve such recovery goals.

We look forward to working with your administration and for a return to sound science-based, transparent policies and decision-making. Consistent with this approach, we hope that you will include the completion of the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Recovery FEIS and issuance of a signed ROD to implement a recovery process as a priority action for 2022. We are happy to provide a packet with further background information on request.

Sincerely,

Rob Smith
NW Regional Director
National Parks Conservation Association

Kathleen S. Gobush, PhD
Northwest Regional Director
Defenders of Wildlife
Mitch Friedman  
Executive Director  
Conservation Northwest

Jasmine Minbashian  
Executive Director  
Methow Valley Citizens Council

Robert Long, Ph.D.  
Senior Conservation Scientist and Director  
Woodland Park Zoo

Phil Fenner  
President  
North Cascades Conservation Council

Erin Farris Olsen  
Regional Director  
National Wildlife Federation

Art Campbell  
President  
North Central Audubon Society

Timothy Manns  
Conservation Chair  
Skagit Audubon Society

Brenda Cunningham  
Support Team  
Indivisible Skagit

Chris Morgan  
Owner/Director  
Chris Morgan Wildlife

Jenni Minier  
CEO  
Mt Baker Mountain Guides

Bec Detrich  
Executive Director  
North Cascades Institute

John Bergenske  
Conservation Director  
Wildsight

Mitch Doherty  
Conservation Director  
The Vital Ground Foundation

**Former Agency Staff** (Inter-Agency Grizzly Bear Committee and NC subcommittee members)

Christopher Servheen, Ph.D.  
Former Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator  
USFWS

Jack Oelfke  
Former Chief, Natural and Cultural Resources  
North Cascades National Park Complex

Karen Taylor-Goodrich  
Former Park Superintendent  
North Cascades National Park Complex
Bill Gaines, Ph.D.
Former Wildlife Biologist, USFS
Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

Andrea Lyons
Former Forest Wildlife Ecologist, USFS
Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

Roger Contor
Former (First) Park Superintendent,
North Cascades National Park Complex

Bob Everitt
Former Northwest Regional Director
Washington State Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
Former Chair of NCGB Subcommittee

Cc:

Shannon Estenoz
Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks
U.S. Department of the Interior

Frank Lands
Pacific West Regional Director
National Park Service

Don Striker
Superintendent, North Cascades National Park Complex
National Park Service