



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,

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National Parks Conservation Association

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

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Cc:

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