

Briefing Statement

Bureau: National Park Service (NPS) and United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Issue: North Cascades Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan/EIS- Public Comment Summary Update
Park Site: North Cascades National Park Service Complex, USFWS Washington State Office
Date: June 7, 2017

Comment Analysis Summary:

- The public comment period on the Draft EIS was open from January 13-April 28, 2017.
- Over 126,000 pieces of correspondence were submitted during the public comment period. These correspondences contained over 176,000 individual signatures.¹
- Public comments were received from all 50 states and 127 countries. Approximately 15% of the comments submitted were from Washington State, and approximately 90% of the comments were from the United States.
- Correspondences were received from official representatives of the following types of organizations: businesses (2), conservation/preservation (29), county government (11), federal government (2), state government (3), town/city government (3), tribal government (8), and non-governmental, such as recreational and civic groups (24).
- Approximately 75,000 of the correspondences were identified as form letters. Approximately 98% of the form letters expressed support for Alternative C-Incremental Restoration.

Summary of non-substantive comments

Non-substantive comments do not require a response under NEPA, but were captured as part of the comment analysis process for this project. The most commonly received non-substantive comments expressed:

- General support for grizzly restoration (109,000 correspondences; 159,000 signatures);
- Support for Alternative C- Incremental Restoration (92,000 correspondences; 135,000 signatures);
- Support for Alternative D- Expedited Restoration (400 correspondences; 7,600 signatures)
- Opposition to Grizzly Bear Restoration (1,300 correspondences; 1,300 signatures); and
- Support for Alternative A- No Action (1,000 correspondences; 1,000 signatures).

Summary of most commonly raised substantive comments

Substantive comments require an agency response under NEPA which will be included in the Final EIS. Among the substantive comments, the most commonly raised issues were with regard to:

- *Alternatives considered but dismissed*- commenters thought the natural recovery alternative dismissed in the Draft EIS represents a viable alternative that should be fully analyzed. Other comments requested inclusion of additional elements that were considered and dismissed including a citizen management alternative and enhanced habitat modification.
- *Elements common to all action alternatives*- commenters requested changes to the geographic extent of the recovery zone and release areas, with suggestions including options to make these areas both larger and smaller. Commenters requested additional information about post-release monitoring of bears, requested specific techniques be eliminated as options for capture, questioned the plan's population goal (200 bears), requested additional mitigation measures to reduce potential for human conflict, suggested additional considerations for source populations, and requested additional information be included about grizzly bear management in the NCE after reaching the population goal.

¹ Numbers in this briefing statement have been updated since June of 2017 to reflect numbers in the final comment analysis report.

- Grizzly bears- comments included questions about whether there are adequate food sources in the NCE to support a population and about the historic extent of grizzly bears in the NCE. Other comments requested additional modeling to better understand survival, movement and reproduction of grizzly bears under any of the alternatives.
- Public and employee safety- Commenters requested additional analysis and information regarding this issue and questioned the analysis in the Draft EIS, with some noting impacts to safety were underestimated and others commenting that the impacts were overstated.
- Socioeconomics- some commenters felt that Draft EIS did not provide enough detail and understated the impacts associated with grizzly bear restoration to local industries while others suggested that the potential beneficial impacts of ecotourism were not identified.
- Washington state law (RCW 77.12.035)- comments pointed out that even though the Supremacy Clause may allow for the federal government to take action, they should not because it is in conflict with the RCW. Other commenters asked for additional clarification regarding the ability of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to participate in grizzly bear management activities given the RCW.
- Purpose and need for taking action- commenters questioned the need for taking action, noting there are populations of grizzly bears elsewhere, suggesting that the purpose and need were written too narrowly and precluded other alternatives, and that it was not supported by science.
- Wildlife and Fish- commenters expressed concerns about impacts to fish populations, including salmon and requested that the analysis be revised to assess these impacts. Other commenters requested additional analysis on the interactions between grizzly bears and other wildlife species in the NCE.
- Visitor use and recreational experience- commenters requested additional surveys be conducted to be able to quantify the effect of an increased grizzly bear population on visitors. Other commenters questioned the level of impact to visitors as presented in the Draft EIS and recommended additional research be cited to strengthen the impact analysis.

Coordination with State and local elected officials

- The agencies have provided informational briefings to numerous State and local elected officials to include staff for Governor Inslee as well as a coordination meeting with commissioners from Skagit, Okanogan, Snohomish, and Chelan counties, and the Mayor of Darrington.
- Based on the information provided at the coordination meeting as well as follow up comments and correspondence from the counties, their main areas of concern regarding grizzly bear restoration are related to the public safety of their citizens and potential economic risks related to reduced tourism, ranching and other agricultural activities.

Next Steps:

- Summer/Fall 2017- Team review of the draft comment analysis report, preparation of responses to substantive comments and revisions to the text of the EIS, continued coordination with local counties.
- January 2018- Publication of the final EIS with the Record of Decision to follow.

Contact(s):

Karen Taylor-Goodrich, Superintendent, North Cascades National Park Service Complex, (360) 856-1934
Eric Rickerson, State Supervisor, USFWS. Washington Fish and Wildlife Office, 360-753-6039