



January 21, 2021

RE: North Cascades Grizzly Bear Recovery

Dear Members of Congress,

Thank you for your commitment to protect the grizzly bear recovery process. Unfortunately, the Trump administration acted irresponsibly in prematurely terminating that process before it could be completed. The former administration's decision failed to meet the requirements of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), ignored the overwhelming majority of Washingtonians, and failed to heed the advice of expert biologists.

Our organizations wish to emphasize our unequivocal support for the resumption and completion of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) that is intended to restore grizzly bears to the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone. We respectfully ask for your continued support for the formal agency-driven recovery process, the completion of the FEIS, and issuance of a Record of Decision (RoD) that respects the requirements of the ESA under direction of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

As you know the EIS that federal agencies initiated in 2015 was derailed last year by the Trump administration without credible explanation or transparency. 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.<sup>i</sup> The administration did not solicit input from, or even give advanced notice to local or regional staff who were charged with completing the FEIS and RoD.

The North Cascades Ecosystem 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 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 "recovered" populations, most of which are still disconnected, would represent approximately 3% of historic grizzly bear range in the contiguous US.

We note that the 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 have 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.<sup>ii</sup>

Moreover, to alleviate concerns about potential conflict between bears and agricultural interests, federal agencies announced plans to promulgate a rule under Section 10(j) of the ESA that would provide local control and flexibility to

manage the population and any potential conflicts. Fortunately, communities in the Rocky Mountains have been living alongside grizzly bears for decades, utilizing nonlethal tools to prevent conflicts between people and bears. Thanks to the work of state and federal agencies, tribes, businesses, and nonprofits, people across the North Cascades are utilizing bear-resistant trash cans, electric fences, and other tools to coexist with grizzlies and other wildlife.

Our North Cascades stage was set for one of the biggest conservation success stories in the region, if not 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.

We thank you for your support to date and urge your continued commitment to follow the law, the science, and the will of the voters who ask decisionmakers to follow the science and complete the process.

Sincerely,

**Rob Smith**

NW Regional Director, National  
Parks Conservation Association

**Bobbi Miller**

Wildlife Conservation Manager,  
Woodland Park Zoo

**Dr. Kathleen Gobush**

Northwest Director, Defenders of  
Wildlife

**Jasmine Minbashian**

Executive Director, Methow Valley  
Citizens Council

**Mitch Friedman**

Director, Conservation Northwest

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<sup>i</sup> Secretary nominee Bernhardt Completed QFRs-pages-69-70, March, 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019.

<sup>ii</sup> North Cascades Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan/EIS- Public Comment Summary Update, National Park Service (NPS) and United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), June 7, 2017.