

Talking Points Regarding the Montana Grizzly Bear Advisory Council

Advisory council [web site](#) & comment link:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/management/grizzlyBear/gbacComments.html>

Process/Public Input:

- The [Executive Order](#) establishing the Grizzly Bear Advisory Council states that “in order to ensure its citizens have a voice in the future of grizzly bears, Montana must provide meaningful opportunities for people to engage in a public discussion around grizzly bear management.” However, the current process doesn’t allow for meaningful public input – council meetings are held on weekdays during the day, when many people cannot attend to learn about the issues, what the council is doing, or provide public comment. At a minimum, a significant portion of each meeting should be held in the evening or on a weekend so that interested members of the public can attend and participate.
- Diversity of scientist perspectives on the status of grizzly bears, recovery, food sources, ongoing threats and other relevant information should be strongly encouraged. Independent scientists, not only state and federal agency scientists, should be invited to address the council and present these perspectives at council meetings.
- Montanans’ voices regarding the conservation and management of grizzly bears are important, but there is also a strong national interest in the future of grizzly bears which must be recognized and valued, especially given that this national interest in grizzly bears is a strong economic driver for the state.

Delisting/ESA:

- This council should not address whether bears should be listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA)– that issue is being decided in the courts based on science and law. Grizzly bears in Montana are currently protected under the ESA.
- The purpose of the council is to “address challenges and to help set a long-term vision for bear management and conservation in Montana” -- not to “pave the way” for delisting as has been stated by some agency leaders.

Connectivity:

- None of the grizzly bear populations in Montana are connected to each other, posing a serious risk to their long-term viability in the lower 48.
- Four of the six grizzly bear recovery areas established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the lower 48 are wholly or partially in Montana; therefore the state plays an absolutely critical role in the future of grizzly bears including connecting and reestablishing populations.
- Achieving demographic connectivity must be a goal of grizzly bear conservation in Montana, in addition to genetic connectivity. Female bears establishing home ranges in

linkages between recovery areas is key to full recovery, including eventual recolonization of the Bitterroot ecosystem.

- Grizzly bear relocation sites in the Bitterroot Ecosystem must be established so that as bears migrate toward the Bitterroot recovery area from other grizzly bear recovery areas, they are not captured and returned. Such heavy-handed management actions work directly against achieving natural connectivity and reestablishing a grizzly population in the Bitterroot.
- Conflict prevention must be a priority in linkage areas in order to achieve connectivity between grizzly bear populations and to establish populations in recovery areas that currently have no grizzly bears, i.e. the Bitterroot ecosystem.

Conflict Prevention:

- Good work to prevent conflicts between people and bears, and bears and livestock, has been done over past decades, but more needs to be done to keep people and bears safe and to achieve connectivity between grizzly bear populations in Montana. In regard to conflict prevention, the council should consider developing recommendations including but not limited to:
 - Prioritization of highest-conflict areas in Montana and identification and implementation of additional effective prevention measures;
 - Additional funding for conflict prevention measures and identification of funding sources;
 - Additional resources for bear conservation and management in Montana, including for public outreach and education measures in communities where grizzly bear range is likely to expand in the future (such as the Bitterroot);
 - Development of a clearinghouse of conflict prevention measures employed by livestock producers and their efficacy;
 - Implementation of recommendations in the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team 2009 Conflict and Mortalities Report regarding conflict prevention between hunters and grizzly bears such as hunting with a partner, not shooting prey late in the day, and carrying bear spray;
 - Support for legislation allowing permanent retirement of livestock grazing allotments from willing producers.
- Montana's Administrative Rules (section 12.9.1401(1)(c)(ii)) state that "sport hunting is considered the most desirable method of . . . minimizing depredations against private property within or adjacent to grizzly bear habitat." This is untrue. Indiscriminate hunting and killing of grizzly bears is not the best way to prevent human-grizzly conflicts. The best way is to use proactive, non-lethal measures such as electric fencing and bear-proof garbage containers that target specific conflict situations and are effective over the long term. The Council should recommend that FWP undertake a rulemaking process with public comment to amend that administrative rule accordingly.