

Forest Plan Revision for the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

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Some Facts about Grizzly Bears & Forest Plan Revision:

A Brief History of the Situation on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

In 1975, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the grizzly bear as a threatened species in the lower 48 states. The Endangered Species Act requires a “recovery plan” for threatened species such as the grizzly bear.

The “North Cascades Ecosystem Recovery Plan for the Grizzly Bear” was finalized in 1997 and was developed through cooperation between the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, and the National Park Service. In addition, a group known as the “Citizens Advisory Group” provided input to the development of this recovery plan. 1353 letters and several thousand comments made on the draft plan were incorporated into the final recovery plan.

The Forest Plans for the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest were implemented in 1989 and 1990 respectively. By law, the “North Cascades Recovery Plan for Grizzly Bear” must be incorporated into Forest Plans as they are revised. Only a portion of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest is affected by the recovery plan. The northern portion of the Cle Elum Ranger District, all of the Wenatchee Valley, Entiat, Chelan, and Methow Ranger Districts, and the western portion of the Tonasket Ranger District are included in the recovery area.

Interim management direction has been in place since 1997, guiding the development of projects on national forest lands. The direction was based on the concept of “no net loss” of high quality grizzly bear habitat (known as core areas) and placed limitations on the construction of new roads and trails. In addition, the interim direction required all newly constructed campgrounds to be fitted with bear resistant garbage and food storage facilities. Existing campgrounds are to be fitted with these devices as resources allow.

How the Recovery Plan works

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in partnership with the interagency North Cascades Grizzly Bear Subcommittee, oversee the recovery of the grizzly bear in the North Cascades. The responsibility of the Forest Service is to manage grizzly bear habitat so that future recovery of the species in the North Cascades can occur. Restoration of the grizzly bear population in the North Cascades (which may include population augmentation) is not within the purview of the Forest Service and would not be a part of Forest Plan Revision. Forest Service management responsibilities consist of two components:

- 1) Management of grizzly bear habitat, and
- 2) Management of potential human and grizzly bear interactions.

These responsibilities are accomplished through the development of management direction that address the following:

Designing vegetation management treatments such as timber harvest and prescribed fire to maintain or restore grizzly bear habitats.

Reducing the impacts of roads on fish and wildlife habitat, including grizzly bears, while providing access for recreation and forest management activities.

Limiting the amount of human foods and other attractants in campgrounds and administrative facilities that may be available to both grizzly bears and black bears (and other wildlife).

Providing information to people about how to camp, recreate and live in bear country (both grizzly and black bears).

Forest Plan Revision Efforts will:

- Establish criteria for the identification and management of priority grizzly bear habitat. Priority grizzly bear habitat consists of areas with an abundance of grizzly bear food, cover, and relatively little disturbance from humans.
- Replace interim “no net loss” direction with guidance on how to balance the needs for recreation access, aquatic/fish habitat restoration, dry forest restoration, sustainable road infrastructure, and other wildlife habitat, including grizzly bears.
- Manage recreation facilities to enhance safety for humans and reduce the risk of bear-human interactions.
- Identify information and education resources that are needed.

Forest Plan Revision Efforts will NOT:

- Make any site specific recommendations about road or trail closures.
- Project specific environmental analysis with public participation opportunities will still occur.
- Make any changes to the location or number of existing recreation facilities or permits.
- Limit the ability to reduce fuels loads and fire risks in high priority areas.