

Grizzlies have a normal range of 60 miles

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“I don’t understand why people want to turn grizzlies loose where they will interact with thousands of recreation-ists, let alone our ranch. There’s not enough wildlife for them to eat. Deer are scarce. There are no elk and very few moose,” said Don Lundgren, 65, who has lived on the ranch all his life.

Grizzlies would have remained plentiful in the North Cascades if they had food, he said. Reintroducing them into a region where they will be short of food will only cause them to leave the high country for ranches, orchards and towns where they can get food, he and other residents reason.

He’s concerned for the safety of his cattle, his family and his ranch guests and that his business will suffer.

Part of his 44,000-acre grazing allotment is only a couple of miles from one of the proposed grizzly release spots, about 10 miles northwest of the village of Mazama. Grizzlies have a normal range of 60 miles.

The restoration of wolves in the state has not been “fair for wolves or people,” he said, adding that cougars are currently the main problem for his 200 mother cows and their calves.

“There are thousands of people who hike up there in the Pasayten Wilderness (part of the North Cascades) and what will they do? There will be some dead people. It doesn’t make any sense,” Lundgren said.

Grizzly worries

Steve Darwood, co-owner of Cascade Wilderness Outfitters and North Cascade Outfitters in Carlton, agreed the North Cascades is not good grizzly bear habitat.

“People deserve a choice. If they want to see grizzlies they can go to Yellowstone (National Park). I have customers who come here from Montana because they can enjoy the high country without the worry of grizzlies,” Darwood said. “This will keep people out of the high country.”

Darwood, 63, has been an outfitter for 50 years. Each year he takes about 200 customers, most of them 55 and older, on horseback into the Pasayten Wilderness on deluxe trips where horses, gear, food and cooking are provided.

“Most of the people who support grizzly restoration are people who will never enter the wilderness,” he said. “It’s just like the wolf program. The west side of the state is in favor of it until a bill passes to introduce wolves on the west side. Then they’re not so in favor.”

Vic Stokes, 64, a Twisp rancher and past president of Washington Cattlemen’s Association, is still recovering from the loss of 100 mother cows, 100 calves and 30 replacement heifers in the Carlton wildfire of 2014. This season is his first back on grazing allotments that have recovered from the fire.

“I think it’s somewhat misguided,” he said of grizzly reintroduction. “Nobody has convinced me it’s necessary.”

His grazing allotments are 18 to 20 miles from proposed grizzly release points.

“People say you’ll learn to live with them. I don’t want to live with grizzlies. I’ve done just fine without them,” he said. “I’ve talked with ranchers over by Yellowstone and they’re a pretty aggressive animal.”

Stokes said he would hope President Donald Trump, if educated about the issue, would turn Zinke around.

Ranches near other towns



Patrick Murphy, of Goat’s Beard Mountain Supply in Mazama, Wash., says grizzlies would be “exciting.”



Steve Darwood



Sarah Ryan



Eric Rickerson

with grazing allotments in the high country could also be impacted.

Several ranchers in those areas didn’t want to be quoted by name, saying they fear retribution from federal agencies. They said no one listens to them, that they’re dealing with wolves harassing and attacking their cattle and don’t want grizzlies, too.

“It’s too bad Zinke threw all of us

under the bus to cow tow to environmentalists. That just blew me away. I thought he was a good guy. He’s still a politician. Follow the money,” said one rancher. “It never ends between the fish to take our water and wolves to eat our cows and now grizzlies. It never stops.”

He called one conservation group “homeland terrorists” who are “trying to kill agriculture.”

Other views

Mazama store owner Missy LeDuc, 54, said Park Service personnel say grizzlies will stay to themselves in remote areas and not be a problem.

“I feel it’s OK, but I’m not an expert,” LeDuc said. “I’m an avid back country hiker and I would be concerned about running into a grizzly for sure.”

Grizzlies have not been a big topic among Mazama’s few residents, she said, adding that her sense is residents are not looking forward to it.

She said she doubts it would affect her business since most tourists drive through and at most take short day hikes.

However, Patrick Murphy, 23, who works at Goat’s Beard Mountain Supply in Mazama, said reintroduction is a great idea because grizzlies are native and “a vital part” of the ecosystem.

“A lot of the outdoor community is OK with it and understands having predators in the ecosystem,” he said. “Ranchers oppose, which is understandable.”

He hikes in Alaska where “there’s a constant threat of grizzlies,” finds it “exciting” and “enjoys the thrill.”

The shop sells hiking, climbing and cross-country ski gear, and business could be hurt by grizzlies, he acknowledged.

Grizzly numbers

Alaska has 30,000 grizzlies, the most in North America, according to the state Department of Fish and Game. British Columbia has about 15,000 grizzlies, according



U.S. Highway 20, also known as the North Cascades Highway, about a mile down the Okanogan County side from the 5,477-foot Washington Pass on May 16. It is part of the North Cascades where grizzlies could be reintroduced.

to the province’s Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations.

The lower 48 states are home to 1,400 to 1,700 grizzlies, with an estimated 800 in Montana, 600 in the Yellowstone and Teton area of Wyoming, 70 to 100 in Northern and Eastern Idaho and “fewer than 20” in Washington’s North Cascades, according to the USFWS.

The 2017 Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan Draft Environmental Impact Statement, or DEIS, for the North Cascades by the Park Service and USFWS states there has been “no confirmed evidence” of grizzlies in the North Cascades since 1996 and the population status is unknown. Four detections of grizzlies in the past 10 years were on the British Columbia portion of the North Cascades, the DEIS states.

Grizzlies have been listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act since 1975.

Plans, release points

The Park Service and USFWS have been studying North Cascades restoration for 30 years or more.

Eric Rickerson, 51, USFWS state supervisor in Lacey, Wash., says the agency has a responsibility to restore endangered species and wants to do it with minimal impact on people.

“The last thing we want to do is put a handful of bears into an area that quickly leads them to a valley bottom with humans. We have to be cautious about that,” he said.

The DEIS presents a no-action alternative and three action alternatives whose goal is restoring a population of 200 bears over 25 to 100 years. Bears would be brought in from Montana and British Columbia.

The DEIS proposes five grizzly release spots, at the north end of Ross Lake near the Canadian border, three within 20 miles of Mazama and one 15 miles east of Darrington.

Darrington residents say the Green Mountain Trail is one of few day hikes in the area but would no longer be safe with grizzlies.

Rickerson said he thinks

release zones will be revisited, with a focus on finding more remote areas. Grizzlies eat a lot of plants and recent research shows there is sufficient habitat in the North Cascades for 200 to 300 grizzlies, he said. People are more the cause of the grizzly decline than loss of habitat, he said.

Fruit ‘like honey’

Opponents maintain habitat is scarce and will force grizzlies into populated areas.

“In Montana, grizzlies can come right down the White River to the valley floor and still be in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Here they will come down to the valley floors and find ranches, orchards, people and towns,” said Jim DeTro, 70, an Okanogan County commissioner.

An example, he said, was a black bear captured April 11 by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife in the town of Okanogan, the county seat. The bear was relocated to the Colville Indian Reservation, from where it had come.

WDFW Sgt. Dan Christensen, 49, said the department traps six to 12 black bears a year, mostly in spring and fall.

“In the spring (when they come out of hibernation) they’re starved of calories and go wherever they can for first food,” he said. “They’re looking for the quick and easy. Our garbage is a good source and their noses are phenomenal.”

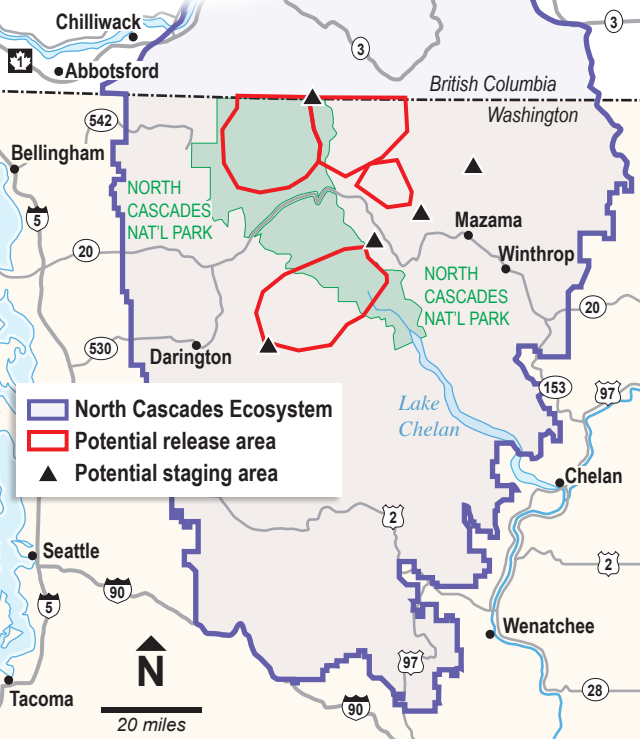
Most everyone he knows, DeTro said, doesn’t want grizzlies.

DeTro and former commissioner Craig Vejraska, an Omak rancher, say a University of Montana professor and bear expert who visited the area in 2004 thought it ideal for grizzlies — but that tree fruit would attract them “like honey.”

“Grizzlies come out earlier in the spring than typical black bear. They’ll be in the snow and that will force them down valleys,” Vejraska said. “I don’t think it’s a wise move at all. We already have a bit of a bear problem with ... black bears. If we turn too small a calf out (to summer range), they just don’t come back. Bear, cougar or wolves get them.”

Christensen said orchards attract bears, especially in recent years as growers leave more fruit on the ground.

Grizzly restoration plan: Proposed staging and release areas



Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; National Park Service Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

“It’s a huge food source and sometimes you see a drunk bear from the apples that have fermented on the ground. We had five bears in a tree in an orchard along the river in Omak. The orchardist was concerned because pickers needed to pick pears,” he said.

But Harold Schell, variety research and development manager for Chelan Fruit Cooperative, said overall bears are not a big problem. “They come down in the fall when the fruit’s ripe. They may damage a few trees, but it’s pretty insignificant,” he said.

Keith Stennes, a Methow grower, said periodically a bear dines in his pear orchard but it’s never been a problem.

More comment

U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash., whose district includes Okanogan County, strongly opposes reintroduction plans. In an April 12 letter to Zinke, he asked that a public comment period be reopened so “local residents who were ignored can be heard.”

Residents were not allowed to express their concerns at a March 2015 public forum in Okanogan and were poorly treated by federal employees, Newhouse said.

Grizzlies will negatively impact ranchers, recreationists and rural economies and their reintroduction violates state law, Newhouse wrote. RCW 77.12.035 directs the state Fish and Wildlife Commission to protect grizzlies and encourage natural regeneration but prohibits their transplanting or introduction into the state. Federal agencies say federal law supercedes state law.

A Newhouse spokesman, on May 16, said the congressman is “coordinating with the (Interior) Department on his request.”

Rickerson said he doesn’t think the agencies ignored the ranchers, that open house forums allow people to ask questions “without fear of being shouted down,” but that the agencies need to look at how to minimize impacts on livestock.

Of nearly 127,000 letters the agencies received responding to the DEIS, approximately 109,000 supported reintroduction and 1,300 opposed it, Rickerson said. Of the 109,000, 92,000 favored incremental restoration, he said. He said he doesn’t know how many letters were from outside the state.

The agencies don’t look to those numbers as much as they look for new scientific information they need to consider, he said.

The state and county Farm Bureaus, several counties, the Washington and Oregon cattlemen’s associations, the Public Lands Council, National Cattlemen’s Beef Association and other groups oppose reintroduction.

Sarah Ryan, 34, executive director of the Washington Cattlemen’s Association, said she and members of the Oregon and Minnesota cattlemen’s associations and the Public Lands Council and National Cattlemen’s Beef Association met with Zinke in mid-April.

“He (Zinke) said, ‘Grizzlies don’t impact cattle, your greater problem is wolves,’” she recalls.

But she disagrees, “Wolves are the bigger problem today but there’s plenty of evidence from Montana and Wyoming cattlemen that grizzlies attack cattle and data that shows grizzlies are worse than wolves.”

A 2016 viral video posted on You Tube shows a grizzly chasing and killing a cow next to a road near Crandall, Wyo., in daylight.

Grizzlies spreading from Yellowstone and killing more livestock have prompted Idaho and Wyoming wildlife managers to consider approving the first trophy hunt for grizzlies in decades.

“I don’t know we convinced him (Zinke), but with continued pressure from our neighbors and locals, there’s still a chance he could select the no-action alternative,” Ryan said.

Final decision

Last March, North Cascades National Park Superintendent Karen Taylor-Goodrich said her agency and USFWS will make the final decision at year’s end and will not need Zinke’s approval.

Rickerson said normally the agencies’ regional directors do make such decisions but that their superiors will be informed and that Zinke or his designee will probably review it before the final decision is made.

The agencies likely will pick one of the four alternatives in mid-June, issue a Final Environmental Impact Statement in September and sign a Record of Decision in late October or early November, Rickerson said.

The action alternatives could be accompanied by a so-called 10-J ruling on an experimental population of grizzlies, allowing a new public comment period and greater flexibility and control in managing the bears, he said.

Hammonds have sought a commutation of their sentences but are hoping for a full pardon

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of their plight culminated in the standoff between federal agents and armed occupiers at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

The father and son asked for clemency from President Barack Obama shortly after resuming incarceration, but it now appears their request has gained traction under the Trump administration.

Protect the Harvest, a nonprofit representing agriculture and hunting interests,

has learned the Hammonds’ request for clemency has in recent weeks come under review by the Office of the White House Counsel Don McGhan, said Dave Duquette, the group’s national strategic planner.

“It’s moving much quicker than we anticipated it moving,” he said. “That’s a good thing, from what I’ve heard.”

The Hammonds have sought a commutation of their sentences but are hoping for a full pardon, which is within the president’s power

to give, Duquette said.

“If they only get a commutation, then they’re still felons,” and subject to a prohibition on owning guns, among other restrictions, he said.

Jerome Rosa, executive director of the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association, said he recently broached the subject with Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke during a visit to Washington, D.C.

Just as Congress recently affirmed that air emissions from livestock weren’t in-

tended to be regulated under the Superfund statute for hazardous waste, so too rangeland fires weren’t intended to be punished as arson, he said.

Zinke agreed with this sentiment, giving the sign of the cross while vowing to give his blessing for their release to President Donald Trump, according to Rosa.

Local employees of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, which is overseen by the Interior Department, seem to have developed

“hard feelings” in the matter and supported the Hammonds return to prison, he said.

The Oregon Cattlemen’s Association and Oregon Farm Bureau are planning to submit a court brief in a civil lawsuit urging that the Hammonds grazing privileges be restored, Rosa said.

Duquette said he believes the Hammonds’ dispute with federal officials in the region originated because the government wanted to buy their

property for inclusion in the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

However, he said, it’s unfortunate that in the public’s mind, the occupation of the refuge has become entwined with the Hammonds, who did not support the takeover.

Pardoning the ranchers would be a show of goodwill by the Trump administration, Duquette said. “It shows they’re getting things done and trying to right the wrongs that were done before.”