



In this Sept. 25, 2013 photo, a grizzly bear cub searches for fallen fruit beneath an apple tree a few miles from the north entrance to Yellowstone National Park in Gardiner, Mont. For the second time in a decade, the U.S. government has removed grizzly bears in the Yellowstone region from the threatened species list. The decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to remove federal protections from the approximately 700 bears living across 19,000 square miles in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming took effect Monday, July 31, 2017.

Alan Rogers/The Casper Star-Tribune via AP

# Yellowstone grizzlies removed from threatened species list

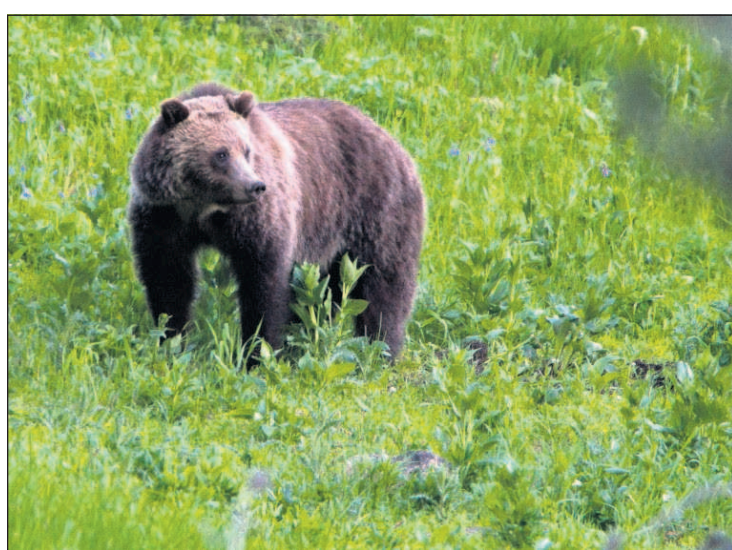
By MATT VOLZ  
Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. — The U.S. government lifted protections for grizzly bears in the Yellowstone region on Monday, though it will be up to the courts to decide whether the revered and fearsome icon of the West stays off the threatened species list.

More than a month after announcing grizzlies in and around Yellowstone National Park are no longer threatened, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officially handed over management of the approximately 700 bears living across 19,000 square miles in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming to wildlife officials in those states.

The ruling does not apply to the approximately 1,000 bears living farther north in the Northern Continental Divide area that includes Glacier National Park and the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

Not much is expected to immediately change as a result of the handover. State wildlife officials have been working for decades to protect the bears as their population grows and their range expands farther away from the oldest U.S. national park, and they say they will continue to do so.



AP Photo/Jim Urquhart

This July 6, 2011, file photo shows a grizzly bear roaming near Beaver Lake in Yellowstone National Park, Wyo.

Federal wildlife officials will also monitor the states for five years and re-impose protections if the population drops below 500 bears.

The bears were determined to be a threatened species in 1975 after hunting and trapping in the 1800s and early 1900s nearly wiped them out. The strict no-kill policy and habitat preservation that came with being on the threatened species list helped their numbers recover in the years since.

Now, grizzly bears can

be hunted again under the management plans submitted by Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. None of the three states will hold a hunting season this year, and wildlife officials say any hunts in the future would be held only after closely examining the effects on the population.

"There are a lot of safeguards in the conservation strategy to ensure the grizzly population will remain," said Kevin Frey, a wildlife management specialist for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Hunting grizzlies is strongly opposed by wildlife advocates and Native American tribes who worry the bears' recovery will nosedive without U.S. government oversight. Multiple organizations and individuals have filed notice that they will sue to place grizzly bears back on the threatened species list.

It's happened once before. In 2009, a federal judge overturned the Fish and Wildlife Service's decision two years earlier to lift protections after the Yellowstone bears' numbers rose above 600. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the judge's ruling in 2011.

The ruling then was that the bears still needed protection because of the decline of the whitebark pine trees — a key food source. Federal wildlife officials say that the bears have now adjusted to a more meat-based diet, and the whitebark pine nuts are no longer vital for their survival.

Wildlife advocates say that change in diet brings a different kind of threat.

Encounters with ranchers protecting livestock and hunters competing for elk and deer have become common as the bears' population has swelled and they wander back into areas where they haven't

been seen in a century.

"We see bears going to areas where they have little chance of remaining conflict-free," Frey said. "It's becoming more challenging with all the people."

Yellowstone National Park Superintendent Dan Wenk said the park supports the removal of grizzlies from the threatened species list but wants to make sure the population remains strong so visitors will continue having opportunities to see the animals.

Hunting still won't be allowed within the park.

After gray wolves were taken off the endangered species list, Yellowstone unsuccessfully sought the creation of a no-kill zone, or buffer zone, around the park. State officials rejected it.

A no-kill zone won't be pursued for grizzlies, Wenk said. Instead, park officials want to be involved with discussions that lead up to decisions by the three states on how to structure their bear hunts — and focus on areas where bears are more likely to have problems with humans and livestock.

"We have never asked for a buffer for bears. But what we have asked for and what is always part of our conversation is to concentrate the hunts in areas of conflict," he said.

## BLOOMIN' BLUES

### Red Sandspurry hides in plain sight

By BRUCE BARNES  
For the East Oregonian

Common Name: Red Sandspurry  
Scientific Name: *Spergularia rubra*

This week we shift to one of the very tiny "most people never see 'em" plants. It is common throughout most of North America and some of South America, but is a native plant of Europe which has been introduced here.

The genus name *Spergularia*, and that of a closely related genus *Spergula*, is from the Latin *spargo*, to scatter. This refers to the plants of both genera which widely scatter their seeds when ripe. *Rubra* is Latin for red. Sandspurry probably refers to its preference for sandy or rocky soil, however the source of the common name spurry is unknown.

The plant is so easy to miss that I'd never seen it until three years ago on the edge of a backwoods dirt road in the Pomeroy district of the Umatilla National Forest. I've since checked, and it is known to be in all four ranger districts of the forest, so it has probably been hiding in plain sight.

Red Sandspurry is an annual plant that grows flat on the ground. The stem can extend up to 2 feet in length, with many branches spreading out and creating a mat. The upper stems and sepals have gland-tipped hairs. The leaves are linear, up to an inch long. There are 5 flower petals, which are light pink and about 1 mm long. To even see the flowers, one must either pick a stem and hold it up close, or get down and look carefully.



Photo by Bruce Barnes

Red Sandspurry, *Spergularia rubra*

As with many of the smallest plants, taking a close look at the flowers through a lens reveals a beautiful flower, regardless of its size and the fact it usually gets ignored and even driven over.

I know of no uses established by Indian tribes, and none listed for the plant in Europe.

Where to find: This plant prefers disturbed, sandy or gravelly soil, such as along the edges of roads.

## Years of fish run work for naught?

By COURTNEY FLATT  
OPB/EarthFix

A chilly pool of water forms at the base of Clear Creek Dam in Washington's Cascade Mountains. Somewhere — hiding in the depths of the water — are several bull trout. They've migrated up this creek and are hoping to make it to cooler waters at higher elevations.

But they're out of luck. "They're just stuck down here," said Jeff Thomas, a fish biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In their way is a big slab of concrete, a dam built in 1914. Its reservoir, Clear Lake, is a recreation area where kids with disabilities or terminal illnesses can spend carefree summer days.

Thomas has worked to help these threatened fish for nearly two decades. He's spent hundreds of hours here.

Two fish ladders at the spillway weren't built properly, and so they're useless for giving fish passage to the waters above the dam.

"It's just really, really violent high hydraulics, and they can't make it up it — under any conditions," Thomas said.

There is a legendary story of a problem fish, a hybrid of a bull trout and a non-native brook trout, that made it up the fish ladder four times. In one amazing stretch of time, the fish spent 12 days hanging out in the spillway. No other fish had been detected making it up the fish ladder before or since.

"She was very athletic," Thomas said.

Thomas helped discover this population. He led a snorkeling team up seven miles of a rugged river searching for any signs fish were reproducing there.

"My entire career, there's been very few days where I didn't want to go to work," he said.

He's so invested in this run that he's putting off his retirement — after a federal hiring freeze could mean his job won't be replaced. That could endanger this bull trout run he's spent most of his time trying to save.

Moving these fish is a lot of work. It's something he'd like someone else to take over — until there's funding to build better fish passage.

"I kind of consider them my population," Thomas said.

Some of "his population" is stuck at the base of this impassable dam. Others are spawning in the cold, glacier-fed water above Clear Lake.

Bull trout don't migrate out to sea like salmon. Migratory bull trout spend time in lakes but swim upstream to spawn in cool, clean water where they were born. Many bull trout runs are threatened by fragmented habitat, often blocked by impassable dams. This run of fish — if they move downstream — can't get back.

"With global warming happening, it's important that we allow the fish to get to this cold water refugia or they'll disappear," he said.