

Show Support for Grizzly Recovery in the Forest Plan Revision

This past year, 2019, three or four grizzly bears were observed in the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests. Radio-collar evidence and photos taken from trail cameras revealed this exciting news.

In 2007, a grizzly was illegally killed in Kelly Creek on the Clearwater National Forest, which is part of the Kelly Creek-Great Burn proposed Wilderness. Since then, conservationists have recognized that grizzlies may once again re-inhabit the excellent grizzly habitat in the St. Joe, Clearwater, and Salmon River Basins.¹

A 2013 Freedom of Information Act request from Friends of the Clearwater also found some intriguing, though not entirely conclusive, photos of bears from the Mallard-Larkins. It also contained a report from an expert Forest Service wildlife biologist along the South Fork Clearwater.

Grizzly bears were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in the US outside of Alaska in the 1970s. Recovery areas were then identified centered around Yellowstone;

Glacier/Northern Continental Divide; the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness; the Cabinet Mountains and the Yaak River in Northwest Montana (including some public land in the far northeast Idaho Panhandle); the Selkirk Mountains in Idaho; and the North Cascades in Washington. The Selway-Bitterroot recovery area was originally centered in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, and included the breaks of the Salmon River north of the Main Salmon (Nez Perce and Bitterroot National Forests), the upper Lochsa, the upper North Fork Clearwater, headwaters of the St. Joe, and land in Montana



Trail camera photo of a grizzly in the Clearwater Basin, September 2019.
Photo Courtesy US Fish and Wildlife Service.

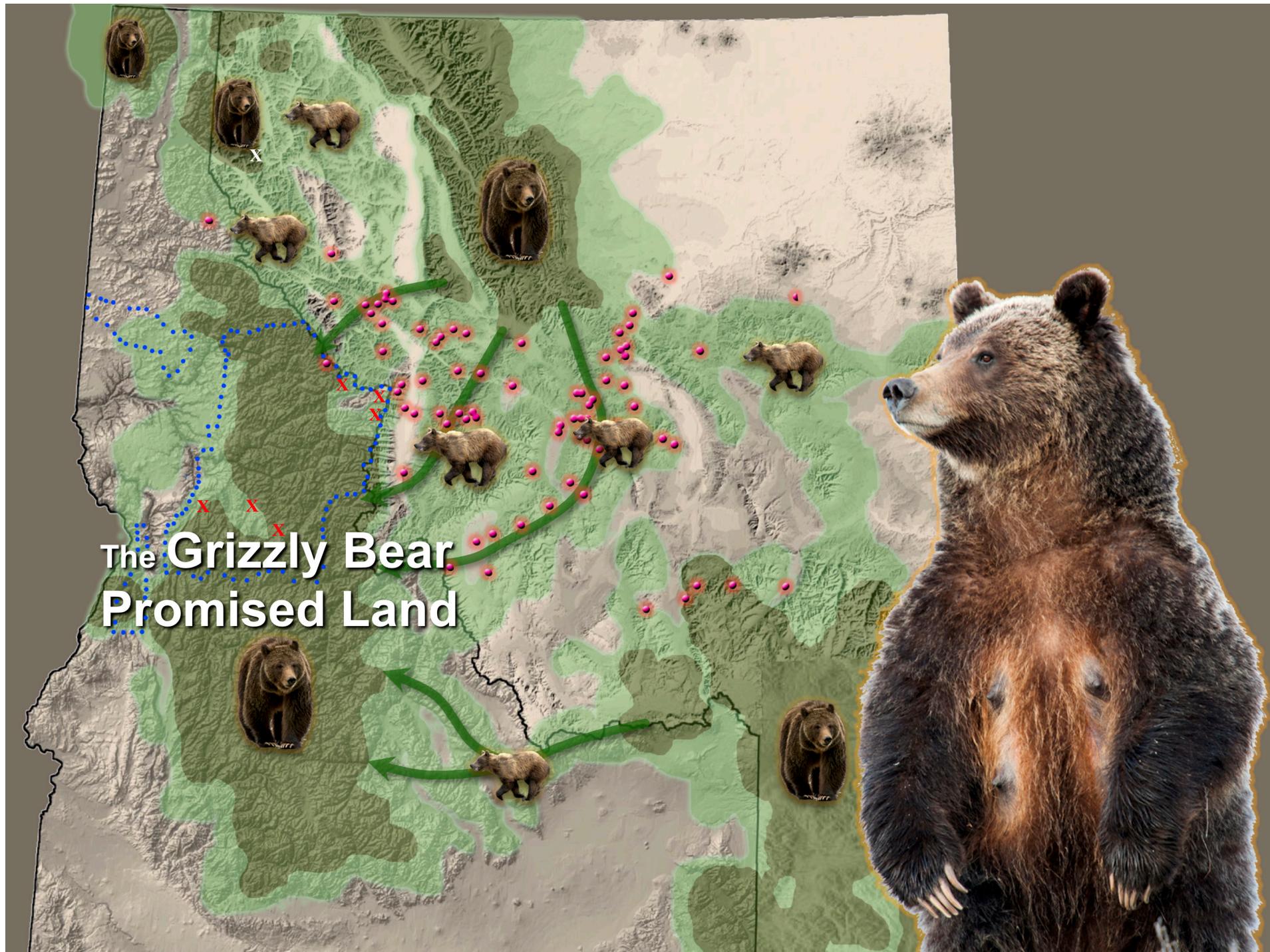
east of the Bitterroot Crest on the Lolo National Forest. The Fish and Wildlife Service now calls the wildest portions of the Clearwater, Salmon, and Bitterroot River systems the Bitterroot Recovery Area.²

However, the new draft plan for the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests does nothing to recover grizzlies and only mentions the bears twice, once in conjunction with the place, Camp Grizzly, and once in a definition

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1 Studies in the 1980s by Idaho Fish and Game turned up several reports of grizzlies in the Clearwater Basin, though none of them were ever confirmed, which at that time usually meant a dead bear.

2 The Bitterroot Recovery Area is much smaller than it should be, comprising of only the Selway-Bitterroot and Frank Church-River of No Return Wildernesses. If all appropriate lands were included, it would be the largest grizzly recovery area in the lower 48 states.



Dr. David Mattson, a noted grizzly researcher, prepared the map (left) for a spring 2019 presentation in Moscow with large carnivore policy expert Louisa Willcox.

- **Dark Green Shading:** critical core grizzly habitat in the US Wild Rockies region of Idaho, Montana, and NW Wyoming.
- **Grizzly Bear Promised Land:** the Salmon and Clearwater Basins, plus surrounding land. The northern half offers the best habitat.
- **Lighter Green Shading:** habitat between the large core habitat in this part of the Rockies.
- **Green Arrows:** corridors for bears to re-inhabit the Wild Clearwater.
- **Pink Dots:** recent grizzly sightings prior to 2019, including the confirmed death of a grizzly in upper Kelly Creek in the fall of 2007.
- **Blue Dots** (added by FOC): the approximate administrative boundary of the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests.
- **Red Xs** (added by FOC): sighting locations of grizzly bears in summer/fall of 2019 in the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests, including the bear on the front cover of this insert.
- **White X** (added by FOC): beginning point of the collared grizzly bear in the Cabinet Mountains who traveled to the Clearwater in 2019.

about wildlife habitat. Indeed, Forest Supervisor Cheryl Probert, expressed dissatisfaction at a meeting in 2018 when it became obvious that grizzlies were moving into the Bitterroot Recovery Area.

Scientific studies by researchers such as Dr. David Mattson and Troy Merrill and the Craigheads show the Clearwater is excellent habitat. A World Wildlife Fund Canada study shows that the Clearwater Basin is the best overall grizzly habitat in the Rockies, from and including Yellowstone National Park, to and including Jasper National Park in Canada. A map from Dr. Mattson on the inside of this insert depicts the high quality grizzly habitat in the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests. Additionally, the Flathead-Lolo-Bitterroot Citizens Task Force is currently mapping where grizzlies have been recently reported across the entire US Northern Rockies between grizzly recovery areas.

Grizzlies are moving into the Clearwater. As David Mattson has pointed out, range expansion may not be due to an increase in numbers, but rather bears dealing with the vagaries of food supply in light of climate change and other human factors. Bears may be expanding their range in search of food, and the Clearwater Basin seems to be a great place for them.

Public comments are due April 20.

Email them to sm.fs.fpr_npclw@usda.gov

Below are talking points:

- **Bear Management Units should be established in the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests.** Given the 2019 sightings, the units should include all of the two national forests, with the possible exception of the Palouse Ranger District on the Clearwater National Forest.
- **All potential denning habitat should be protected.**
- **All wildlife corridors should be protected so that grizzlies can move to find necessary habitat and food.** Not only are the Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests excellent habitat, they can link bear populations in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, the Northern Continental Divide, the Cabinet-Yaak, and the Selkirk Grizzly Bear Recovery Areas. All of this habitat is interlinked and crucial because it provides genetic diversity.
- **The Forest Service needs to assert its authority and prohibit bear baiting in grizzly habitat. All the roadless areas should be closed to motorized and mechanized use including land contiguous to the Gospel-Hump Wilderness.** This would protect much denning habitat and important corridors.
- **Food safety measures need to be established for front country campgrounds in grizzly habitat and backcountry travelers.** In addition, campgrounds that have non-functioning, bear-proof dumpsters that date back to the early 2000s must be brought into good repair.
- **People need to be informed about grizzlies and their habitat at campgrounds in grizzly habitat.** Every developed campground has a kiosk or sign board where that information could be displayed. Information efforts off the national forests are also crucial.