

Deb Haaland
Secretary of the Interior
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

May 20, 2021

Dear Secretary Haaland,

We the undersigned organizations and experts welcome you as Secretary of the Interior. We write to urge the Department of Interior to maintain protections of the grizzly bear under the Endangered Species Act, protect habitat, and to advocate for the funding and implementation of non-lethal co-existence measures to support communities living near bears.

The best available scientific information indicates there is no biological or legal justification for delisting any grizzly bear population in the lower 48 states at this time. If the grizzly is delisted, the states of Montana, Wyoming and Idaho will initiate trophy hunting in conjunction with current policies that will lead to the killing of bears¹ and a reduction of their habitat.² The hunting of grizzly bears is opposed by the Indigenous Nations and the vast majority of the American people. [*The Grizzly: A Treaty of Cooperation, Cultural Revitalization and Restoration*](#) has been signed by 170 tribal nations, making it the most signed treaty in history. As grizzly bears play a significant role in the history, stories and culture of tribal nations in the United States, we ask that your office continue to protect grizzly bears and their habitat areas so that they may continue to live and flourish. As you know the tribal nations in the U.S. are not included in the oversight of any listed species. Indigenous people have a long history of living alongside the grizzly and other animals so their input should be a part of all proposals concerning the delisting of any species.

Ease of movement is essential to the re-establishment of a breeding population in the Bitterroot Ecosystem in Idaho and Montana³ as described in biologist Dr. David J Mattson's recent report [*The Grizzly Bear Promised Land*](#). We urge the Department of Interior to adopt and encourage policies that will reduce barriers to grizzly bear movement and establishment of resident populations throughout their suitable habitat. These may include improvements in habitat connectivity,⁴ wildlife crossings,⁵ voluntary grazing permit retirement,⁶ larger landscape

¹ Current Montana Trapping Legislation to [extend trapping season](#) outside the denning season, [allow wolf neck snares](#) and leg traps, and allow [more killing of bears](#).

² Montana legislation [to limit grizzly bear relocation](#)

³ The establishment of a breeding population of grizzly bears in the Bitterroot Ecosystem is essential to a connected population throughout the Northern Rockies.

⁴ https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5365012.pdf

⁵ Rutherford, A., Ellis, C., McGowen, P., McClure, M., Ament, R., & Grebenc, J. 2014. Highway mitigation for wildlife in northwest Montana. Sonoran Institute, Northern Rockies Office, Bozeman, Montana.

⁶ Voluntary Grazing Permit Retirement Act: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/5737/text>

protection,⁷ and strict limits on logging and road building in occupied and potential grizzly bear habitat.⁸

Coexistence strategies are proven to protect grizzly bears and bolster social acceptance as they move through landscapes that may include people. Unfortunately, these programs have been woefully underfunded with a demand that significantly outstrips the supply of available funding. We urge the Department of Interior to advocate for a permanent fund to enable non-lethal measures for livestock producers and communities living with large carnivores. Long-term funding for electric fencing, carcass removal programs, range riders, and other measures can reduce depredation and protect livestock producers. Funding for education and [Bear Smart](#) programs support communities that live alongside grizzly bears by securing attractants and preventing conflicts with bear resistant garbage cans and structures, electric fencing, and other measures.⁹

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns and ideas. We greatly appreciate your consideration of continued protections for grizzly bears under the Endangered Species Act, additional policies to protect grizzly bears and their habitat, and advocating for permanent funding to ensure continued coexistence measures for communities in bear country.

Sincerely,

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⁷ Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act: <https://maloney.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rep-maloney-introduces-legislation-to-protect-pristine-northern-0>

⁸ For example, the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests sold 85 million board feet of timber in FY 2020. That is over double the annuals from the forests from 2000 through 2015 and the highest number in decades.

⁹ The [2020 final report from the Montana Governor's Grizzly Bear Advisory Council](#) recommended that "state and national partners explore, create, and implement a dedicated federally-appropriated grizzly bear conservation fund."

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