

LETTER: Locals support North Cascades grizzly bear restoration

(Targeted at residents of Okanogan and Chelan counties. Residents of other local counties welcome).

To:

Honorable Congressman Dan Newhouse, WA – 4th District

David Bernhardt, Secretary of the Interior

As residents living in communities surrounding Washington's North Cascades, we value our natural heritage and wish to express our willingness to coexist with native wildlife, including grizzly bears.

The North Cascades are an iconic area consisting of nearly 10,000 square miles of contiguous wild lands, anchored by the North Cascades National Park and several large Wilderness areas. We choose to live here because close connections to nature support our quality of life. Whether by farming, hiking, hunting, biking, guiding, outfitting or simply residing in rural and remote places, we purposefully live, work and play near areas that are also home to wildlife. As such, we respect the need to coexist, and are willing to take sensible steps towards sharing these lands with wildlife of all sizes.

As long as grizzly restoration is guided by sound science and community input, including careful management to reduce and resolve potential conflicts, we support restoring grizzly bears to the North Cascades. Our home has been their home for thousands of years, and today they need our help.

Across the lower 48, grizzly bear habitat has shrunk dramatically, and the North Cascades are one of the few remaining places suitable for grizzlies. The North Cascades are ideal grizzly habitat because they are rugged, remote and vast, with an abundant diversity of plant species that provide the bulk of the bears diet. Unfortunately, the North Cascades are geographically isolated from other grizzly habitat by roads and human development. Because of this isolation, natural recovery is infeasible. Biologists have determined that unless we supplement the local population, we are at risk of losing these bears forever.

Restoration proposals under the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Restoration Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) are modest: approximately five bears per year over 5-10 years, with the initial goal of restoring a population of 25 grizzly bears in the backcountry in and around North Cascades National Park. Biologists estimate that it could take up to a century to fully recover grizzly bears in the North Cascades Ecosystem, as grizzly bears reproduce very slowly and cub survival rates can be low.

This plan strikes the right balance between the needs of grizzly bears and the needs and values of local communities. With the right amount of support from our elected and community leaders, the National Park Service and other agencies, as well as public education and outreach, we are fully capable of coexisting with grizzlies as neighbors.

We support recovering our local grizzly bear population through best science and community involvement because it will help keep the North Cascades a natural, beautiful and wild place in which to live, work and play.

Sincerely,

The undersigned residents of Okanogan, Chelan and other counties neighboring the North Cascades.