



Environmental News, Opinion, and Art

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## Yellowstone Delisting Beginning of End For Griz

By Doug Peacock

**Only A Federal Challenge Can  
Stop The April 29, 2007 Delisting**

On March 29, 2007, the Department of the Interior removed federal protection for Yellowstone's grizzly bears under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). On April 29th this 'de-listing' will take effect. Only a challenge in federal court can stop this final ruling.

I believe this decision will mark the beginning of the end of the grizzly in the contiguous states. Here are three reasons: Insofar as the Yellowstone population's de-listing is based on estimates of the number of bears, the removal of ESA protection for the grizzlies in and around Glacier Park (where the data on numbers is considered more reliable) will soon follow.

Second, de-listing may represent one of the most destructive actions this administration has yet taken against the natural world, largely because the Yellowstone grizzly delisting policy was developed hand-in-hand with the government's denial of the existence of global warming, an unimaginable firestorm approaching us all, and this proposal reflects that lingering ignorance.

Finally, the myopic and political removal of Yellowstone's grizzlies from the Endangered Species list effectively eliminates practical discussion of the linkages necessary for countless species of plants and animals that will need to move northward and higher to survive.

I'm saying that our best chance of keeping alive and pragmatic the visionary idea of interlinking corridors (like those proposed by the Wildlands Project, Yellowstone to Yukon, the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act and others) is the attainable goal of connecting the isolated grizzly ecosystem of Yellowstone northward to Canada. Without the protection that was afforded the bear under the ESA, the opportunity to complete those linkages will soon be cut off by human development and Yellowstone will remain the island that refutes our grand dreams for connectivity. The grizzly still affords the widest available biological shoulders upon which countless plants and animals may hitch a ride in their struggle to adapt to rapidly shifting habitats.

The decision to remove Yellowstone's grizzlies from the ESA can now only be reversed by a suit in federal court. Legal arguments will revolve around about

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bear biology. Here are some concerns: The greatest climatic changes in history are now facing the Yellowstone ecosystem and already threaten major bear foods. Whitebark pine, and the nuts it produces, is arguably the grizzly's most important fall food. A two-degree warming since the 1970s has rendered these trees vulnerable to blister rust and beetle infestation; whitebark pines are dying and could be eliminated from Yellowstone Park within a few decades. Remnant stands of trees would survive only in the coldest outlying regions of the ecosystem, namely the Wind River Range of Wyoming. With de-listing, management of this last refuge for pine nut eating grizzlies will be turned over to the state. Wyoming's bear management plan would not permit significant numbers of grizzlies anywhere in the Winds and none at all in the southern half of the range.

The Forest Service and Wyoming post de-listing management plans are inadequate for grizzly survival. The number of bears in Yellowstone has rebounded because the grizzly was listed on the ESA in 1975. The Federal Wildlife Service has credibly administered this policy and they should keep doing it. The FWS currently claims that it can make 'adjustments' or re-list the bear if the Yellowstone grizzly population again plummets. But it will be too late by then. The states lack the resources to monitor the number of grizzlies. This is not the time for a change in the great bear's status.

There are other issues, other food problems, but the nut remains this: the Yellowstone grizzly is an island ecosystem surrounded by a sea of human industrial and commercial development chewing up the remaining habitat needed for the genetic and physical linkage to northern populations and necessary for long-term survival. On top of that, great and uncharted changes driven by global warming are coming to us all.

Grizzlies are touted for their adaptability and ability to find new food sources. They should be as well suited to survive the predicted wave of extinction as any wild animal, except for the attitudes, personified by intolerance and greed, of people who historically have killed them and destroyed their habitat. Sometime in this century Homo sapiens must contend with real threats to our own survival and may recognize in the face of the adversary those same human attitudes. During these times, a vigilant generosity towards the natural world is not inappropriate; may we hope for a distant reciprocation.

This note is my first, and perhaps last, fundraising letter. I wrote it because of the enormous and destructive importance of this governmental action: We cannot afford to allow the final ruling to remove the bear from the ESA to slip through uncontested. I also wrote it because of my unmitigated faith in the people of the Bozeman office of Earthjustice to do the work. You can support the legal efforts to protect this magnificent species by writing a check to Earthjustice, indicating that your contribution should be allocated to the Grizzly Delisting case. The cost of expert witnesses, court costs and attorney time for a case of this magnitude will likely exceed \$500,000.

If you have the means and might consider making a substantial donation toward this case, please call Doug Honnold at Earthjustice, (406) 586-9699, with any questions or to discuss it further. All levels of support are greatly welcomed: checks may be sent to Earthjustice, 209 S. Willson Ave., Bozeman, MT 59715.

Contact [Doug Peacock](#) for more information about protecting Yellowstone's fragile grizzly population.



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