

Grizzly Bear

Ursus arctos

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Fact Sheet

April 2011



Official Status: Threatened.

Threatened species are species that are likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of their range.

Listed

40 Federal Register 145; July 28, 1975.

Historical Status

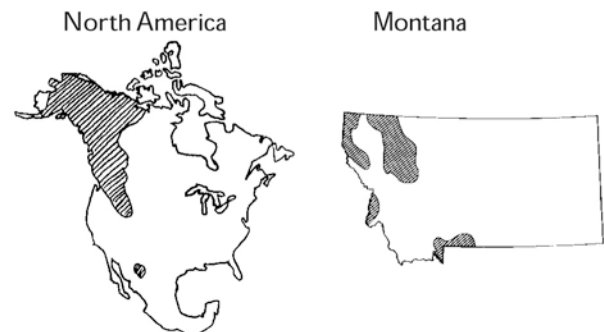
Grizzly bears once ranged from the Arctic Slope to Central Mexico and from the Pacific Coast to Minnesota. In Montana, grizzlies were associated with large buffalo herds, but occurred in forested areas and high mountains as well. As the bison were basically exterminated, the great bear disappeared from its primary foothill/river valley range.

Present Status

Today, the grizzly mainly occupies high mountain wilderness areas and associated foothills in western and south central Montana. Grizzlies are known to use low-elevation habitats, notably along the east front of the Rocky Mountains and along the base of the Mission Mountains. Grizzlies in the Cabinet-Yank area are being augmented by Canadian populations. Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem populations are stable and at recovery levels. Yellowstone grizzly populations appear to be increasing or stabilizing.

Habitat

Grizzly bears use a wide variety of habitats within a range of variable size (7-1,245 square miles) depending on food availability and distribution. A seasonal elevation gradient is often used including low elevation riparian areas, snow chutes, and meadows in spring and fall, and higher elevation habitats such as subalpine forests, alpine tundra, and boulder fields in summer, early fall and winter. Mixed shrub fields, seeps, grasslands, timbered side hill parks, and old burns are used for feeding and resting. Dense timbered habitats are often used for denning and daytime bed sites. In summary, moist open-land habitats in combination with timbered areas are essential for optimum grizzly bear habitat.



Present range of the Grizzly Bear

Life History

Grizzly bears have one of the lowest reproductive rates of any mammal. Females do not breed until 4-7 years of age and usually produce cubs every 3 years. Usually, 2 cubs are born in the den and spend the next 2 years with the mother. The breeding season extends from about mid-April to mid-July. Except for groups of females with cubs, grizzly bears are solitary animals but do concentrate at rich feeding sites. Grizzlies eat a wide variety of plant and animal foods.



Aid to Identification

Grizzly bears are larger than their black bear cousins. Males average 300-500 pounds; females 150-400 pounds. Fur color varies from black to blond. Silvery guard hairs often give a grizzled look. Long, straw colored curved claws, humped shoulders—the shoulder is the highest point on the back in contrast to the black bear's where the top of the hips is the highest point—and a concave muzzle are diagnostic.

Reasons for Decline

Grizzly bears are wide ranging and require large areas of undisturbed habitat. Their population decline is primarily associated with excessive mortality and habitat loss from human encroachment. Oil and gas development, recreational development, improper livestock grazing, poaching, excessive road access, and poorly designed timber harvest are factors responsible for the grizzlies' threatened status.

Recommendations

Contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (if requested by the landowner) prior to initiating any activities that affect grizzly bear habitat. Report any suspected grizzly sightings to a wildlife agency.

Comments

Today's grizzlies are relatively shy and generally avoid contact with humans. However, they can be very aggressive and dangerous in certain circumstances. Grizzly bears occasionally kill livestock. Garbage dumps and carcass piles should not be placed in grizzly habitat.

References

Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1993.

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