



# Bitterroot Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan EIS

## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

### Quarterly Update—Summer 2024

Website: <https://www.fws.gov/BitterrootEIS>

In January 2024, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) initiated the development of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for the restoration of grizzly bears in the Bitterroot Ecosystem of Idaho and western Montana.

The following entities are cooperating agencies assisting the USFWS in the preparation of the EIS:

- U.S. Forest Service
- Idaho Fish and Game
- Idaho Office of Species Conservation
- Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks
- Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
- Nez Perce Tribe
- Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe
- Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs
- Custer County, ID
- Mineral County, MT
- Ravalli County, MT
- Missoula County, MT
- Sanders County, MT

### Public Scoping Comment Analysis

The USFWS published a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register* on January 18, 2024. The publication of the NOI initiated a 60-day public scoping period that ended on March 18, 2024. We received 1,276 comment letters, including 171 form letters and one petition signed by 1,329 residents of a county in the study area. 2,486 comments were derived from the comment letters. The comments included support and opposition for grizzly bear restoration. Some commenters specifically opposed USFWS reintroduction, opting in favor of natural recolonization. Other comments focused on the proposed Purpose and Need statement and Study Area for the EIS. Commenters raised several issues including concerns over grizzly bear interactions with agriculture and livestock, recreation and travel management, and public health and safety. Commenters were also concerned with other wildlife and fish species and populations in the study area and the potential interaction or competition with grizzly bears. Finally, some comments asserted the positive effects of restoring grizzly bears to the ecosystem and wilderness areas. Comments are being used to develop the scope of the EIS, including potential revisions to the Purpose and Need statement and issues to be analyzed.

### Alternative Development and Population Projects

The USFWS continued progress on development of sections of the draft EIS, including minor revisions to the project purpose and need. Based on the public scoping comments, USFWS has been developing and reviewing a range of possible alternatives for analysis in the draft EIS. The determination of a reasonable range of alternatives includes a screening process based on criteria including meeting the project purpose and need and feasibility. This effort includes projecting grizzly bear population growth over time under different scenarios such as natural recolonization and reintroduction.

## Next Steps

The USFWS will continue development of the draft EIS using alternatives carried forward from the alternative screening process for publication and public review in July 2025. We will continue to provide quarterly progress updates.

