

*Wildlife and Hunting Heritage
Conservation Council*

December 14, 2016

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Jewell and Secretary Vilsack:

As members of the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council, we are writing to reaffirm our strong support for removing the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem population of grizzly bears from the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Official population estimates of around 700 bears in this ecosystem have exceeded recovery criteria for a number of years now, and we appreciate the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's ongoing efforts with the States of Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana to ensure that healthy population levels are maintained.

It is equally important for the Service to put forth a delisting rule that is scientifically and legally defensible. It will not serve the best interests of grizzly bears or the ESA to put forth another predator delisting rule that gets indefinitely delayed by litigation.

When we wrote you in September of last year in support of this delisting, we noted that the required delisting rule is a detailed task requiring close coordination among the Service, the states, and the public. We requested a briefing on the issues that remain outstanding, which we still desire to have. We are concerned that there continues to be some disagreement on fundamental terms of the rule and the science underpinning it between the states and the Service, and between the Service and federal land management agencies. This creates unnecessary legal vulnerabilities for the delisting rule.

We urge you to make sure this and other risk factors to the bears and the rule are resolved immediately and the final delisting rule is released. It is imperative to finalize this delisting correctly and completely and show that recovered populations of large predators can be successfully returned to state management.

Sincerely,



John Tomke, Chair
Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council

cc:
Dan Ashe, Director, USFWS

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