

Secretary Ryan Zinke
Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

RE: North Cascades Grizzly Bear EIS

October 17, 2018

Dear Secretary Zinke,

Thank you again for your interest in the recovery of grizzly bears to Washington's North Cascades Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone. We are excited for the process to move forward as you directed. As such, we are concerned by a significant slowdown on progress to complete the Final Environmental Impact Statement, which is to set a formal process for restoring grizzly bears to the zone.

Last spring, you visited Washington State and made an important stop in Sedro-Woolley. At this doorstep of the North Cascades, you announced your full support for grizzly bear recovery in the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone and committed to complete this process before the end of 2018. We were pleased to hear your unequivocal support of the fair, open and public process through which grizzly recovery was being conducted. Prior to your visit, work on the recovery plan had stopped. But thanks to your leadership and vocal support, work resumed on a pace for the FEIS to be completed on time. ***Your Department of Interior even stated grizzly bear recovery in the North Cascades as one of its top 2018 conservation goals.***

Prior to the close of the public comment period, the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service held six public meetings during EIS scoping, eight public meetings and two webinars explaining the Draft EIS, and at least 70 informational briefings and meetings with tribes, local municipalities, counties, district Congressional staff, and other interested parties. At the request of a handful of stakeholders, the agencies also extended the public comment period by another 45 days to allow for additional input. This level of public outreach and the time invested into receiving this public input has been impressive and represents one of the most exhaustive outreach efforts for an EIS process that we have witnessed.

Despite the clear direction you provided earlier this year, work on the FEIS once again appears to have stopped. We are aware that the agencies have taken additional time to consider and evaluate further stakeholder input. But we are concerned that there is no plan for receiving such input, particularly because the formal public comment period on the DEIS closed in April 2017, leaving the agencies with no legal authority to coordinate or host additional meetings. They can only attend meetings by invitation and receive feedback.

Given the extensive outreach already conducted by the agencies, it is also unclear if additional meetings are needed to receive new information and feedback from stakeholders. Additionally, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is developing a Section 10(j) rule to guide grizzly bear management in the North Cascades, allowing interested stakeholders additional opportunity to provide input during the upcoming rule making process.

Given the terrific interest in this issue to both DOI and stakeholders, we would like DOI to provide an update on the status of the FEIS and a timeline for its completion by - as directed by you - the end of this year. We recognize that your agencies have made an enormous investment in the process to restore this

national icon to the North Cascades, and we are concerned about efficient use of these resources. Our goal is to be supportive of the process in the best manner possible.

Over 80% of Washington voters support grizzly bear recovery in this wild corner of the Pacific Northwest for many of the same reasons you articulated last spring in Sedro-Woolley. As this process evolves, our organizations are committed to ensuring human-bear conflicts are avoided by providing bear awareness education and conflict avoidance tools such as electric fences and bear-proof trash cans.

Your leadership will continue to be integral to completing the FEIS and restoring grizzlies to the Northwest. We look forward to working with your Department and regional staff to ensure that grizzlies once again roam the wild heart of Washington's North Cascades.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to an update on the FEIS process.

Sincerely,

Mitch Friedman, Executive Director
Conservation Northwest, Seattle

Tom France, Regional Executive Director
National Wildlife Federation, Missoula

Rob Smith, Northwest Regional Director
National Parks Conservation Association, Seattle

Peter Zahler, VP of Conservation Initiatives
Woodland Park Zoo, Seattle

Alan Varsik, Director
Northwest Trek Wildlife Park | Pt. Defiance Zoo
and Aquarium, Tacoma

Chris Morgan, TV host, conservationist &
filmmaker
Chris Morgan Wildlife, Bellingham