

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 22, 2021

The Honorable Debra Haaland
Secretary, Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland,

On March 31, 2021 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced the completion of the Species Status Assessment for the grizzly bear in the lower-48 states. While the report confirmed the grizzly bear is continuing to make remarkable progress towards recovery range-wide, most important for our three states—it also confirmed grizzly bear populations in the Northern Continental Divide (NCDE) and Greater Yellowstone Ecosystems (GYE) are biologically recovered. Noticeably absent from the agency’s subsequent listing recommendation, however, was any mention of a path forward to return management to the state.

The USFWS’s Species Status Assessment found that the GYE and NCDE populations have met the recovery criteria, ecosystems have high resiliency, and are reporting an increase in the movement of bears between ecosystems. This is not anything new—in fact, the report is very similar to previous reports spanning two decades that document healthy and thriving grizzly bear populations in these two ecosystems. It has been sixteen years since the GYE population was first proposed for removal from the endangered and threatened species list and since then, Republican and Democratic Administrations alike have supported returning the GYE management to the states. Grizzly bears have nearly tripled the extent of their occupied range in the GYE since the 1980s and reporting a conservative estimate of 737 bears, the USFWS believes it has reached carrying capacity. Similarly, the NCDE has more than doubled its size in range and tripled its population count from as few as 300 bears in 1986 to 1,068 bears today.

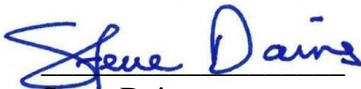
The established track record of GYE and NCDE grizzly bear recovery coupled with the seemingly inaction by the Administration to follow the science and pursue a return to state management has left many officials and constituents in Montana, Wyoming and Idaho scratching their heads. As such, we request you respond to the following questions:

- Does the Department of the Interior concur with the USFWS and the independently peer-reviewed species status assessment that the grizzly bear in the GYE and NCDE has biologically recovered?
- What did the Department of the Interior rely upon when determining not to recognize, assess, and provide recommendation on Distinct Population Segments and is this indicative that the Administration may change listing or recovery criteria or Administration DPS policy going forward?
- Has the Department of the Interior reviewed the grizzly bear state management plans in our respective states?

- When do you anticipate the Department of the Interior will move forward to return grizzly bears in the GYE and NCDE to state management?
- If the Department of the Interior has not yet made a determination on how to proceed with managing the GYE and NCDE, please provide information on how the Department of the Interior will make that determination and what could prevent moving forward with a delisting decision as recommended by wildlife biologists.
- How does the Department of the Interior intend to reduce the human-grizzly and livestock-grizzly conflicts becoming increasingly common in our respective states?
- Does the Department of the Interior recognize the roles and strategy of that of States to further facilitate the movement of grizzly bears between ecosystems?

The successful recovery of the NCDE and GYE grizzly bear epitomizes what the authors of the Endangered Species Act first envisioned. We are hopeful that future management of the bear will follow the science, honor the commitment and resources invested by Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho over the past five decades, and not be subject to political whims. Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho stand ready to take the lead in protecting the grizzly bear for generations to come and we stand ready to partner however appropriate to ensure a smooth transition.

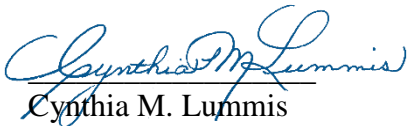
Sincerely,



Steve Daines
United States Senator




Matthew Rosendale, Sr.
Member of Congress



Cynthia M. Lummis
United States Senator



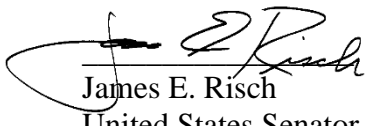
Liz Cheney
Member of Congress



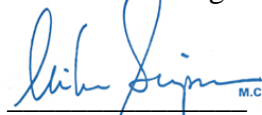
Mike Crapo
United States Senator



Russ Fulcher
Member of Congress



James E. Risch
United States Senator



Mike Simpson
Member of Congress



John Barrasso, M.D.
United States Senator