



Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council

711 Central Avenue, Suite 220, Billings, Montana 59102

Ph: (406) 252-2550

Fax: (406) 254-6355

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Office of Senator John Barrasso
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington D.C., 20510

Dear Senator Barrasso,

As you are aware, throughout tribal communities there is widespread opposition to the delisting and trophy hunting of the grizzly bear in Greater Yellowstone. Two Wyoming-based member tribes of the Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council (RMTLC), the Eastern Shoshone Tribe and Northern Arapaho Tribe, have been at the forefront during this issue. The Eastern Shoshone Tribe was the first tribal nation to pass a formal resolution opposing the delisting and trophy hunting of the grizzly as it is presently constituted, and the Northern Arapaho Tribe has lodged numerous complaints with the Department of Interior and US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) throughout this process. The Northern Arapaho Elders Society is among the multiple tribal nations, traditional governing societies, and spiritual leaders who are plaintiffs in *Crow Tribe et al v. Zinke*, in which tribes have filed suit against the FWS for failure to consult, and violations of AIRFA and RFRA.

As a point of reference, Greater Yellowstone is wholly comprised of the ancestral and treaty lands of all member tribes of the RMTLC. The grizzly bear is integral to the religious and cultural practices of the RMTLC tribes. The area where Wyoming intends to hold its grizzly trophy hunts is, in fact, a virtual matrix of sacred sites with fundamental ceremonial significance to the RMTLC member tribes. It is, therefore, deeply disturbing to learn of Wyoming's planned grizzly trophy hunt, slated to begin September 1. An analysis just released by Dr. David Mattson, a retired US FWS scientist and highly regarded author of numerous peer-reviewed and published articles, contradicts recent media presentations made by Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) officials in the following statement:

The grizzly bear mortality rates applied this year to calculate allowable mortality are designed to reduce the population of grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, not sustain them. Wyoming's planned trophy hunting quota (2 females and 10 males) constitutes nearly twice as many as would be prudent, even given the previously adopted MOA goal of reducing the grizzly bear population. To place this in context, applying the allowable MOA mortality to the states based on currently occupied habitat within non-NPS portions of the DMA, Wyoming's prudent portion available for trophy hunting would be approximately 1 female and 3 males. Presently, Wyoming is planning to offer licenses sufficient to kill 200-300% of these numbers. Outside the DMA, Wyoming plans on allowing trophy hunters to kill 12 bears, in what WGFD has designated Hunt Unit 7, which equates to approximately 1000% of what might be considered even remotely sustainable.



For RMTLC member tribes, and indeed tribal nations throughout the western states, this is nothing short of disastrous. In March 2017, Chairman AJ Not Afraid of the Crow Nation presented the historic treaty, *The Grizzly: A Treaty of Cooperation, Cultural Revitalization and Restoration* to the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. This stands as the most-signed tribal treaty in history, with over 200-tribal nation signatories. Earlier this year, the RMTLC submitted public comment to the FWS on the impacts of *HSUS v. Zinke* on the grizzly delisting rule (Docket No. FWS-R6-ES-2017-0089), from which I quote:

“Should the Service retain serious concerns about ‘grizzly bear populations and their lost historical range’ (USFWS release, 12/6/2018), it should give serious weight to *The Grizzly: A Treaty of Cooperation, Cultural Revitalization and Restoration*, with respect to formulating future grizzly bear management plans. Central to the treaty are the grizzly reintroduction articles. Instead of trophy hunting the grizzly, tribal nation treaty signatories advocate relocating grizzlies from the GYE to sovereign tribal lands in the grizzly’s historic range where biologically suitable habitat exists among tribes that seek to explore and participate in such a program. The same quota of grizzlies that would be hunted per season by the states, could easily be trapped and relocated to lands under sovereign tribal authority and jurisdiction, removing any possible rationalization for reinstating trophy hunts.

This plan provides for cultural and environmental revitalization for participating tribal nations, as the grizzly is sacred to a multitude of tribes. Both the physical and cultural environments of tribes have been incomplete since the federal and respective state governments eradicated the grizzly. As outlined by a multitude of tribal organizations and in numerous individual tribal resolutions, returning the grizzly bear to participating tribal nations offers to provide great economic potential to communities most at need for economic impetus and investment. Several tribal nations are already working on eco-tourism plans centered upon grizzly re-introduction. Tribal management plans would feature Traditional Ecological Knowledge and offer vocational opportunity for tribal members in the field of grizzly biology and management. If trophy hunting seasons are opened upon the grizzly bear, the Service will have empowered the states to not only kill the sacred grizzly bear, but to also kill economic and cultural revitalization for tribes across the western United States in the grizzly’s historic range. The tribal reintroduction plan fulfills the criteria of the ESA, which the current GYE delisting rule and state organized trophy hunts do not.”

Should Wyoming formally implement its grizzly trophy hunting plan, it will strike a devastating blow to tribal communities - for which there is no justification, given the existing, viable alternative. Tribal nations want to be partners not plaintiffs, and to that end and in that spirit, the RMTLC would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to find a pathway forward that might accommodate tribal, federal and states’ interests.

With sincere thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,



William F. Snell, Jr.
Executive Director,
RMTLC

