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Polling shows 80% support for restoring North Cascades grizzly bears

New partnership of conservation, business and other groups back the return of a missing Northwest icon

SEATTLE – A strong majority of Washington voters support efforts to restore grizzly bears in the North Cascades, according to a [new poll](#) conducted by Tulchin Research.

The poll, conducted in May 2016 for Defenders of Wildlife, found [80 percent of registered voters](#) in Washington support efforts to help the declining population of grizzly bears in the North Cascades recover. Notably, this overwhelming support extends across gender, generational, regional, and even partisan lines – with 89 percent of Democrats, 70 percent of Republicans, and 74 percent of independent voters backing these efforts. The poll finds Washington voters hold the grizzly bear in high esteem, with 91 percent agreeing with the statement that grizzly bears are a vital part of America’s wilderness and natural heritage. Eighty-one percent believe that the “the State of Washington should make every effort to help grizzly bears recover and prevent their disappearance” and 85 percent of voters agree that “efforts to help the North Cascades grizzly bear population to recover should be science-based and led by expert biologists.” Other polling results are available here: <http://www.defenders.org/sites/default/files/publications/polling-finds-washington-voters-support-grizzly-bear-recovery-in-north-cascades.pdf>

“Voters in Washington value grizzly bears as a vital part of our natural heritage and strongly back science-based efforts to help the population in the North Cascades to recover,” said Elizabeth Ruther biologist and Northwest representative for Defenders of Wildlife. “This is an issue that unites voters across party lines. The poll results reinforce that Washington residents care about grizzlies and will do what it takes to ensure this iconic species doesn’t die out in our lifetime.”

The poll coincides with Washington State’s official [Bear Awareness Week](#), which runs June 4 through 12, 2016 and an announcement of a newly formed coalition called the [Friends of the North Cascades Grizzly Bear](#). This coalition of scientists, conservation organizations, local businesses, tribal nations, and a growing roster of rural and urban residents is working to advance the widespread local, regional, and national support for restoring a healthy population of grizzly bears to their native home in the North Cascades through a multi-year Environmental Impact Statement process started by the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2015.

“Wherever grizzlies thrive, so does wildness, clean water and abundant native fish and wildlife,” said Rob Smith, Northwest Regional Director for National Parks Conservation Association, one of several coordinating organizations behind the new collaborative effort. “We need to save the Cascade grizzly bear for future generations – and the time to act is now.”

“Public planning to restore a healthy grizzly bear population to the high-quality habitat of the North Cascades Ecosystem marks the potential turning point in the decades-long decline of the last grizzly bears remaining on the U.S. West Coast,” said Chase Gunnell, Deputy Communications Director for Conservation Northwest, a local organization that has worked for more than two decades to restore the North Cascades grizzly population. “Without active recovery efforts, these bears may soon be gone forever.”

“Humans benefit from grizzly bears living in the North Cascades Ecosystem,” said Fred Koontz, Vice President of Field Conservation for Woodland Park Zoo. “Their very presence indicates wildness, biodiversity and health in our region. Environmentally and ethically, the right thing to do is restore this magnificent species to its original landscape.”

“Grizzly bears are truly one of the most amazing species found in the Northwest,” said Northwest Trek Wildlife Park’s Zoological Curator, Marc Heinzman. “They’re fascinating and engaging animals which we should be proud to have in our wildlands. Their role is paramount to a healthy landscape, and today they need our help.”

If the North Cascades grizzly population is successfully restored, the region will once again have functioning populations of all iconic wildlife species that were present prior to the turn of the 19th century. According to the friends, that is a momentous conservation achievement possible in very few places in the continental United States. And one that Washington state, and the nation, can be proud of.

Background:

Grizzly bears have lived in Washington’s North Cascades for approximately twenty thousand years. In 2016, wildlife experts estimate that fewer than ten remain, making it the most at-risk bear population in North America. In 2015, the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), in coordination with other federal and state agencies, began a multi-year public Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process to plan for the restoration of a healthy and functioning grizzly bear population in the North Cascades. Designated a national Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone in 1997, the area encompasses approximately 9,800 square miles from the U.S.-Canada border south to Interstate 90 and is anchored by North Cascades National Park. It’s one of the largest contiguous blocks of wild public land remaining in the lower 48 states.

The National Park Service, USFWS and other agencies are expected to release draft EIS alternatives for restoring a healthy grizzly bear population to the North Cascades in the fall of 2016. Public comments on those alternatives will be open at that time.

In June 2015, the federal agencies released a summary report of the approximately 3,000 public comments submitted during the EIS scoping period held in early 2015. Of those who submitted comments in support of or opposition to grizzly bear restoration during that period, comments from grizzly bear restoration supporters outnumbered those from opponents by over five to one.

The highly intelligent, charismatic grizzly is a symbol of strength and cultural significance for many Native American and First Nations communities across the Northwest. A vital part of our region’s ecosystems and thus of our natural heritage, the grizzly bear is also a yardstick to gauge the ecological health of the Northwest’s wild places.

Friends of the North Cascades Grizzly Bear:

Learn more about the Friends of the North Cascades Grizzly Bear, an independent and informal partnership supporting the restoration of a healthy and functioning grizzly bear population in the North Cascades Ecosystem, at www.northcascadesgrizzly.org. Supportive resolutions, testimonials,

frequently asked questions, resources and helpful links, bear safety information, and more are available on the website.

More than two dozen supporting organizations and businesses and over 500 supporting individuals have already signed on as Friends of the North Cascades Grizzly Bear. Steering Committee organizations for this collaborative effort include Conservation Northwest, National Parks Conservation Association, Woodland Park Zoo, Defenders of Wildlife, Northwest Trek Wildlife Park and the National Wildlife Federation.

More information on grizzly bears in the North Cascades, and the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process considering how best to restore them, can be obtained from the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) at: <http://igbconline.org/north-cascades/>. Additional information on bear awareness and bear safe living, working and recreating practices can be obtained from Western Wildlife Outreach at: <http://westernwildlife.org/grizzly-bear-outreach-project/>

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