



North Cascades Grizzly Bear Subcommittee

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North Cascades Grizzly Bear Sighting

An inter-agency panel of grizzly bear experts has identified a bear photographed last October in Washington's North Cascades Mountains as a grizzly bear. This is the first Class 1 report of a grizzly bear in the North Cascades ecosystem since 1996. Class 1 reports are considered verified sightings of a species that include physical evidence such as tracks or a photograph of the animal with a geographically-verifiable background. Although State and Federal agencies have been working to recover the North Cascades' small native grizzly population for over twenty years and receive multiple reports of possible grizzly bears each year, most turn out to be black bears. Photographs taken by a hiker who encountered the animal are the first known confirmed photos of a living North Cascades grizzly bear in perhaps a half-century.

Grizzly bears in the North Cascades are protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act and by State law. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) believes there are fewer than 20 grizzlies in the U. S. portion of the North Cascades, with perhaps that many more in the adjoining Canadian portion of the ecosystem.

"This is a significant event in the world of Grizzly Bear recovery," said Becki Heath, Chair of the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Recovery sub-committee of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC). "Although grizzly bears once occupied the North Cascades, the current population appears to be at very low levels. We rarely have evidence of their presence in the ecosystem."

Joe Seville was hiking in October of 2010 when he encountered the bear feeding on a steep slope in the Upper Cascade River watershed. He watched the animal for a while, then snapped some pictures and left the area. Seville knew the bear didn't look like the black bears he had seen but didn't realize he had seen a grizzly bear or that the sighting was unusual until he began discussing the encounter with friends and sharing his photographs.

In May 2011, Seville contacted the North Cascades National Park to share his story and the photographs. NPS bear biologist Anne Braaten realized their significance and contacted Seville for more information. Braaten, who is part of the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Subcommittee of the Inter-Agency Grizzly Bear Committee, shared Seville's account and photographs with her peers in the group, who also believed the bear to be a grizzly. That group passed the information on to Dr. Chris Servheen, the USFWS Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator, who sent the photo to a group of grizzly bear experts to review. That group unanimously confirmed the animal in the photo as a grizzly bear.

Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest biologist Bill Gaines, who is leading a grizzly bear hair-snare study currently underway in the North Cascades said the area where the bear was sighted had already been identified as great bear habitat and a good area to place hair-snare gear.

“When we started the study we convened a group of bear biologists and looked at the maps for combinations of terrain, forage and other things that would appeal to grizzly bears” Gaines said. “The area where this bear was sighted is on our list but we have limited resources. We just haven’t gotten there yet.”

Gaines said he hopes to get hair-snare gear in to the area this field season – probably in late summer. Hair-snare studies utilize barbed wire corrals with bear-attractive scents in the center. When the bear enters the corral it leaves hairs on the surrounding fence. DNA extracted from the material can provide scientists with important information about the bear, including species, sex, and some things about parentage. The ability to identify individual bears through DNA samples is an important tool in determining how many grizzly bears are in the North Cascades, how they are related and whether they are reproducing. To see a five-minute video describing this research project visit

<http://nwparkscience.org/node/988> .

The North Cascades Grizzly Bear Management Subcommittee is a subgroup of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) directing the recovery of grizzly bears in the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Recovery Area of north-central Washington and southern British Columbia. Members include the USFWS, NPS, USDA-Forest Service, British Columbia Ministry of Environment, and the Washington Departments of Fish and Wildlife and Natural Resources. The North Cascades Grizzly Bear Recovery Area is one of the largest contiguous blocks of Federal land remaining in the lower 48 states, encompassing approximately 9, 565 square miles within north central Washington. Stretching from the US-Canada border south to Interstate 90, it includes all of the North Cascades National Park, and most of the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie and Wenatchee-Okanogan National Forests.

To learn more about grizzly bears, including how to tell grizzly bear and black bears apart, the biology and behavior of grizzly bears, history of grizzly bears in North America, tips on bear safety and information on the management and recovery of grizzly bear populations, visit <http://www.igbconline.org/> or <http://bearinfo.org> .

Editor’s note: The four photographs submitted to the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Recovery sub-committee are available on the USFWS Washington Fish and Wildlife Office website at: <http://www.fws.gov/wafwo/index.cfm>

Photo credit:Joe Sebille.