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Yellowstone Grizzly Bears Still on Road to Recovery Despite Latest Twist in Delisting Saga

Washington, DC (November 22, 2011) – Today, a federal appeals court ordered the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to reinstate Endangered Species Act protections for grizzlies in the Yellowstone region. The Court found that the USFWS developed solid criteria for managing bears once they were delisted, but that the agency had failed to justify delisting given concerns about a decline in an important food source for the animals. Warmer weather due to climate change allowed beetles to flourish and devastate whitebark pines that produce nuts the grizzlies rely on for food. The bears will be relisted as a threatened species.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service delisted the bears in 2007 once their populations began to grow. Because the Yellowstone grizzly numbers exceeded all recovery targets, the National Wildlife Federation and its affiliates in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming intervened on behalf of the USFWS in the litigation challenging the delisting decision.

“We’re disappointed in the Court’s ruling,” said [Tom France](#), regional executive director of the Northern Rockies Regional Center for the National Wildlife Federation. “While we respect the Court’s decision and understand that it was reached after a thorough review, we continue to believe that the Yellowstone grizzly has recovered and is a great Endangered Species Act success story.

“We will work with the federal and state agencies that developed the grizzly recovery strategy to address the concerns raised by the Ninth Circuit,” France said. “We’re confident a package can be put together that meets the Endangered Species Act and allows the states of Montana, Idaho and Wyoming to assume management authority over grizzlies in the Yellowstone.”

While the Ninth Circuit found the analysis of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the whitebark pine issue inadequate, the court did sustain the regulatory program developed by the USFWS and state fish and wildlife agencies in the Yellowstone region.

“The Ninth Circuit recognized that we have a good grizzly bear management plan,” France said. “We need to do additional work on the science surrounding the interaction between whitebark pine and grizzlies. We are confident this Conservation Strategy will be the key to continued recovery and future delisting for Yellowstone grizzlies as their populations continue to grow.”

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