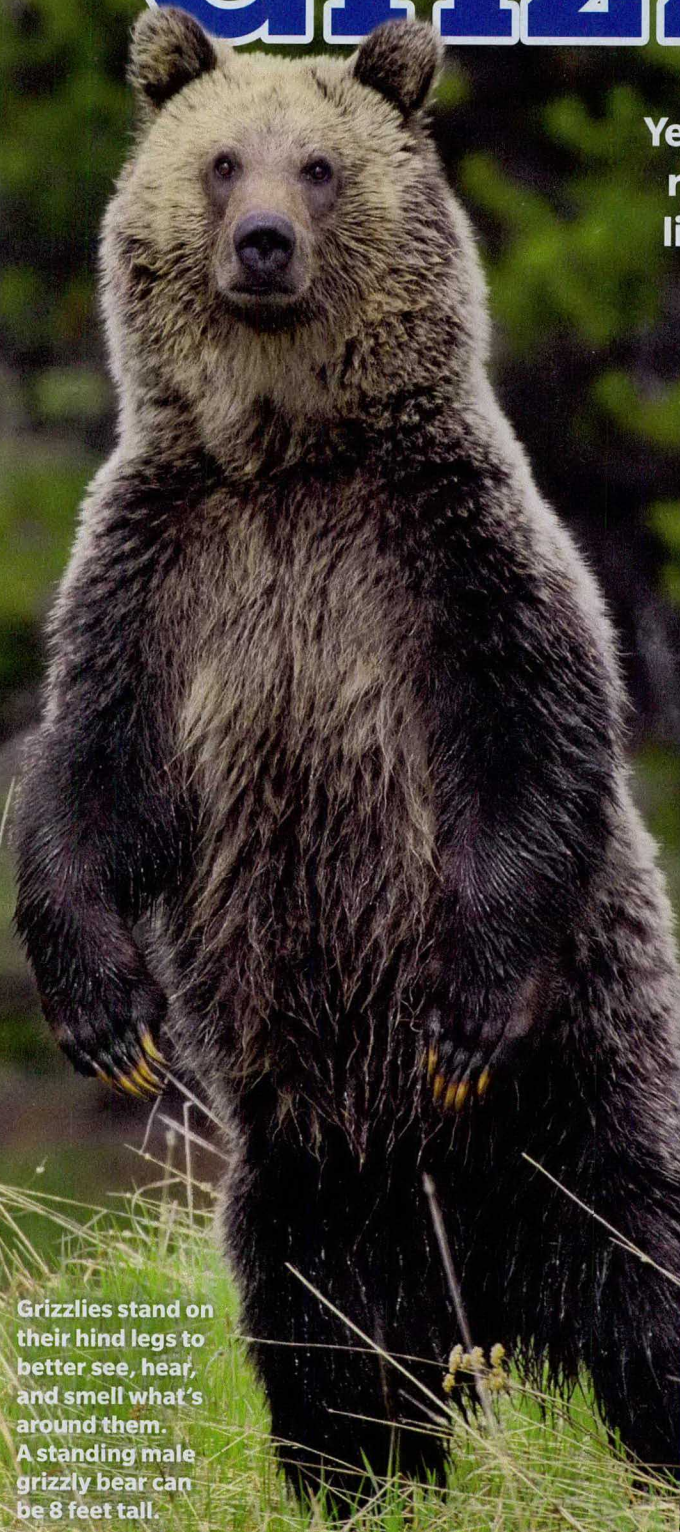


Good News for Grizzlies?

Yellowstone's grizzly bears were recently removed from the endangered species list. So why isn't everyone celebrating?



Grizzlies stand on their hind legs to better see, hear, and smell what's around them. A standing male grizzly bear can be 8 feet tall.

Yellowstone National Park is America's oldest national park. It is located mostly in Wyoming but spreads into Montana and Idaho. Each year, people from around the world visit to see the park's wildlife—including its grizzly bears.

But in the early 1970s, fewer than 140 of the bears could be found in the park and its surrounding area. The number of grizzlies had also fallen sharply throughout the rest of the **contiguous** United States.

To help save the bears, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) added them to the endangered species list in 1975. Endangered animals are at risk of becoming extinct. It's illegal to kill, harm, or capture an endangered animal. The habitats of animals on this list are also protected. Thanks to that protection, the grizzly population in the Yellowstone area has bounced back to about 700.

In July, the FWS removed Yellowstone grizzlies from the endangered species list. Some people say that's something to celebrate. But **conservationists** say the bears should remain on the list. This has led to a roaring debate over whether the grizzlies are still endangered.

Words to Know

contiguous *adjective*. connected or touching. Alaska and Hawaii are not part of the contiguous United States.

conservationists *noun, plural*. people who work to protect wildlife and natural resources

Grizzlies in the West

Making the List

As many as 100,000 grizzly bears once roamed the western U.S. But in the 1800s, settlers began to build homes and farms on the land where the bears lived. This caused their habitat to shrink. For years, hunters also shot any grizzly they saw. By the 1970s, the bears had vanished from most of the U.S.

In 1973, the U.S. Congress passed the Endangered Species Act. It was meant to protect animals that were in danger of dying out, like grizzlies. Now the FWS says the number of Yellowstone grizzlies has grown enough that the bears are no longer endangered.

Frank van Manen works for the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team. The group monitors the Yellowstone bears. He says the Endangered Species Act was designed mainly as a way to help species recover.

“It was never intended that a species would be on the list forever,” says van Manen.

An Uncertain Future?

But many people say the grizzlies' recovery is far from complete. Yellowstone is one of

Tens of thousands of grizzlies roam throughout Alaska, where they have never been endangered. But in the rest of the U.S., they live only in six separate areas. Yellowstone grizzlies have been taken off the endangered species list, but the bears in the other five areas have not. This map shows the estimated number of grizzlies that are in each area.



six areas where grizzlies live in the Northwest (see “Grizzlies in the West”). Conservationists say the recovery of Yellowstone’s grizzly bears won’t be truly successful until they link up with other groups of grizzlies in the Northwest.

Like all wildlife, grizzly bears will always be protected within Yellowstone National Park. But conservationists are worried about grizzlies that wander outside the park. The three states surrounding the park are now free to pass laws that allow

people to hunt the bears.

Many grizzlies are already being killed. Last year, about 40 bears were killed by humans in the area around Yellowstone. A couple were accidentally shot by hunters. Several other grizzlies were hit by cars. Partly because of these factors, the grizzly population in the Yellowstone area has actually dropped in recent years. The current total is down from 757 bears in 2014.

The Sierra Club is one of several conservation groups that plan to fight the FWS in court. These groups argue that the Yellowstone grizzlies still need government protection.

“In a lot of ways, the grizzly bear story is a success story,” says Bonnie Rice of the Sierra Club. “But I would argue that it’s a success story still in the making.”

—by Joe Bubar and Karen Kellaher



Tourists take photos of a grizzly mother and cub crossing a road in Yellowstone National Park.

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