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June 7, 2016

The Honorable Daniel M. Ashe
Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife
Department of the Interior
1849 C St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Ashe,

I would like to congratulate you on the significant progress the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and its partners have made toward protecting and recovering grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE). The tremendous growth of this population of bears is a testament to the effectiveness of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the many people who have worked tirelessly to restore the grizzly to this landscape deserve our highest praise.

However, I am concerned that the recent proposal to isolate GYE bears from the rest of the grizzlies in North America and remove it from the list of ESA threatened species does not do enough to ensure that these bears will continue to thrive. Specifically, the proposed rule makes the bold assumption that the states of Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho will put in place grizzly bear management plans containing adequate and enforceable regulatory mechanisms as required by the ESA. While these three states are currently developing their management plans, the contents of the final products are largely unknowable at this point. Further, the U.S. Forest Service has not started the process of amending forest plans in the GYE to incorporate necessary post-delisting conservation measures.

Ensuring that federal land managers and state wildlife officials have in place plans that will conserve grizzly bear habitat, allow for connectivity of GYE bears with other populations, and limit mortality to sustainable levels is critical to conservation success after ESA protections are removed. This is especially important given the scientific uncertainty surrounding the availability of forage for GYE grizzlies, and how climate change could cause them to range farther in search of food, increasing the likelihood of interactions with humans. For these reasons, I respectfully ask that you commit to not issuing a final rule on GYE grizzlies until after the state and Forest

Service have finalized their plans, the Service has allowed for additional public comment on the utility of these plans as part of a post-delisting conservation strategy, and Service scientists have deemed the plans adequate and enforceable as required by law. Rushing to finalize the rule without addressing these concerns will likely result in the Service losing yet another lawsuit – an outcome that no one wants.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please have your staff contact Matt Strickler on the Natural Resources Committee Democratic Staff at (202) 225-6065. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources