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COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

CHAIR, INDIAN AND INSULAR AFFAIRS

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE WEAPONIZATION
OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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The Honorable Martha Williams
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Williams,

We write to express our frustration and disappointment in your recent decision to postpone the finalization of the 12-month finding for the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) of grizzly bears, as mandated by the Endangered Species Act (ESA), until no later than January 31, 2025. This decision is clearly not based on any scientific ambiguity on whether the GYE population of grizzly bears is recovered but seems to be based on the political science of punting this decision until after the General Election. This decision is made more vexing by the fact it contradicts direct answers given by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) personnel at a recent Committee on Natural Resources hearing. We demand you follow the clear science that the GYE population of grizzly bears has recovered and promptly remove it from the endangered species list.

The science that the GYE population is fully recovered is clear, according to the most recent Grizzly Bear Management Report, all recovery criteria for the GYE population have been and are currently being met. This is why the state of Wyoming submitted a petition to delist the GYE population on January 21, 2022, more than two and half years ago.¹ When the petition was filed, Wyoming estimated the GYE population to be 1,069 bears,² this number is well above the recovery goal set by the Service of at least 500 grizzlies or to maintain an average of 674 bears.³ Grizzlies are also occupying each of the 18 Bear Management Units within the GYE and annual mortality rates continue to be under the recovery limits, showing that the population is well distributed and is not at risk of extinction.⁴ In the over two and half years since Wyoming submitted its petition, several violent incidents involving grizzly bears have been well publicized, some as far away as 80 miles outside of areas considered biological and socially suitable for grizzly bears.⁵

¹ 88 FR 7658

² "Wyoming's push to delist grizzly bears from endangered species list faces opposition from anti-hunting group." Michael Lee. Fox News. 1/21/22. [Wyoming's push to delist grizzly bears from endangered species list faces opposition from anti-hunting group | Fox News](#)

³ "Grizzly Bear Recovery Program." 2021 Annual Report. Grizzly Bear Recovery Program. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. [2021 GBRP Annual Report.pdf \(fws.gov\)](#)

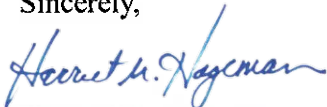
⁴ "Grizzly Bear Recovery Program." 2022 Annual Report. Grizzly Bear Recovery Program. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. [2022 GBRP Annual Report.pdf \(fws.gov\)](#)

⁵ "Grizzly confirmed in Wyoming Bighorn Mountains; Bear Killed for Attacking Cattle." Mark Heinz. Cowboy State Daily. 4/15/2024. [Grizzly Confirmed In Wyoming Bighorn Mountains:... | Cowboy State Daily](#)

The decision to push back the announcement on the status of the GYE population is made more unacceptable by responses from Service personnel to questions from members of Congress. For example, during a recent Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries hearing, Deputy Director for Management and Policy Steve Guertin answered several questions on this topic. When asked when the Service would publish its GYE 12-month finding, Mr. Guertin stated it would be published “by the end of this month [July].”⁶ Mr. Guertin also stated, in response to a hypothetical scenario of a listing petition being filed for the GYE today, that petition would probably be rejected based on the listing factors set forward in the ESA.⁷ It is unclear to us what has changed in the two weeks between this hearing and the announcement to postpone the 12-month finding to justify such an action.

We again urge you to follow the science and to move to delist the GYE population of grizzly bears. The ESA was not meant to keep species listed indefinitely but was designed to protect species in need of protection and to delist those species once they have recovered. By every metric, the GYE population of grizzly bears are a recovered species and an ESA success story, which should be celebrated as such. It is time for the Service to act, not delay even further.

Sincerely,



Harriet M. Hageman
Member of Congress



Matt Rosendale
Member of Congress



Pete Stauber
Member of Congress



Russ Fulcher
Member of Congress



Ryan Zinke
Member of Congress

⁶ “Legislative Hearing on H.R. 7544, H.R. 8308 & H.R. 8811.” Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries. House Committee on Natural Resources. 7/9/2024. [Legislative Hearing on H.R. 7544, H.R. 8308 & H.R. 8811 | Water, Wildlife and Fisheries Subcommittee | House Committee on Natural Resources](#)

⁷ *Id.*