

Do Rural Residents In And Near Recovery Zones Support Grizzly Bear Recovery?

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Grizzly bears are currently found in less than 2% of their former range in the lower 48 states and there are thought to be fewer than 20 grizzly bears remaining in the US portion of the North Cascades Ecosystem. Since grizzly bears were listed as threatened by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, recovery efforts have proven to be contentious, especially among residents who live in or near recovery zones. However, it is unclear whether the statements of vocal opponents to recovery accurately represent the opinions of the majority of rural residents who live in or near grizzly bear recovery zones in the US. This study assessed the knowledge and attitudes of rural Skagit and Whatcom County residents who live in or within 15 miles of the North Cascades Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone in Washington State. A randomized telephone survey of 508 adults examined knowledge of grizzly bear biology and behavior, level of support for grizzly bear recovery and associated management activities, and attitudes toward wildlife and land management agencies charged with recovery of grizzly bears in the North Cascades. Survey results revealed limited knowledge about grizzly bears, positive attitudes toward grizzly bears, strong support for recovery (76% overall support and 52% strong support), moderate concerns about the accuracy of information provided by agencies, and high expectations that local residents will work with agencies to achieve recovery. These findings place in context the statements of strong opponents to recovery and enable wildlife and land management agencies to work with the broader rural human population to achieve recovery, while still addressing the legitimate concerns of residents who may be negatively impacted by grizzly bear recovery.