



The Western Landowners Alliance advances policies and practices that sustain working lands, connected landscapes and native species.

May 16, 2025

Public Comments Processing
Attn: FWS-R6-ES-2025-0186
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
5275 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, VA 22041-3803

Re: *Comment on the Grizzly Bear Listing and Revised Section 4(d) rule*

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Staff:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed *Grizzly Bear Listing and Revised Section 4(d) rule*. The Western Landowners Alliance (WLA) is a landowner-led, non-partisan organization that advances policies and practices that sustain working lands, connected landscapes, and native species. WLA members are proud stewards of the Western landscape, including BLM, USFS, state and private lands. Our members are dedicated to managing and conserving working lands for the benefit of both people and wildlife.

We must begin to recognize and reward the land stewards who are providing habitat for endangered species. Species recovery cannot succeed without meaningful partnerships with landowners and financial mechanisms that recognize and fairly compensate them for providing habitat. Private lands provide critical habitat connectivity for grizzly bears, yet landowners bear disproportionate costs of coexistence. These lands also face the greatest risk of development and habitat conversion¹. While this proposed rule attempts to expand flexibility around legal “take”, more is needed to proactively prevent conflict and fairly compensate landowners. A robust agency framework that includes compensation, conflict prevention, lethal control, and collaboration with producers—commonly referred to as the 4Cs —will help ensure that grizzly bear recovery and the sustainability of working lands advance together.

We respectfully submit the following comments and recommendations on the proposed rule:

1. Clarify the Distinct Population Segment (DPS) Boundary

The proposed Distinct Population Segment (DPS) boundary includes areas with limited habitat suitability and dense human populations, raising concerns about grizzly bear management feasibility. We request clarification on how the boundary was determined, how it will be enforced, and recommend adjustments to better reflect likely future grizzly bear occupancy. A revised Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan aligned with the DPS would help clarify priorities and expectations.

2. **Clarify Producer Take Provisions**

The rule should clearly define what constitutes compliance for landowners, including how “take” incidents will be investigated, what evidence is required, and what liability may result. State wildlife agencies will play a major role in implementation, therefore, better clarity and increased federal support to state agencies is essential to ensure adequate enforcement.

3. **Define Connectivity Corridors**

Connectivity corridors are mentioned in the rule but not clearly delineated. FWS should map these areas to guide authorized agencies and landowners in understanding where take can occur without additional approval, ensuring transparency, enforcement, and reducing confusion. These important connectivity areas could be used to guide FWS in deploying additional resources, such as incentive-based programs, to landowners who are stewarding habitat and suffering economic losses due to conflicts with grizzly bears.

4. **Expand Take Provisions for Producers when Recovery Criteria are Met**

Livestock producers operating in high-conflict zones face serious challenges, and they need greater flexibility and tools to manage bear-livestock interactions effectively. Increasing flexibility within established recovery zones with high density grizzly bear populations would better align management with on-the-ground realities. These regions should also be a high priority for deploying more resources to land managers to mitigate conflict. So long as recovery criteria have been met, the rule should allow for authorized take by producers not only on private lands outside of recovery areas but also on private land and public land grazing allotments within recovery areas.

Recommendations beyond the proposed rule:

- **Increase State Resources**

State agencies lack the funding and staffing to meet the new responsibilities in this proposed rule. FWS should expand direct grant support to enable states to manage grizzly populations, prevent conflicts, and collaborate with landowners.

- **Develop Economic Support for Stewardship and Habitat**

As increasing grizzly bear populations expand both inside and outside recovery areas, FWS should recognize the indirect economic costs borne by private landowners providing habitat. Incentive-based models such as habitat leasing and payment for presence programs will help keep working lands intact and will result in greater species conservation and recovery in the long-run. WLA has developed a suite of these models and stands ready to work collaboratively with FWS to integrate them into the species recovery framework and ESA implementation.

WLA appreciates the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's effort to enhance management flexibility for grizzly bear conservation through the proposed revision of the 4(d) rule. However, the effectiveness of this rule and recovery of the grizzly bears will depend on meaningful support for landowners and clarifying and expanding certain elements of the rule outlined above. We also stress the need for a comprehensive 4C agency framework. The economic viability of working lands is key to recovering grizzly bear populations. We welcome continued conversation with FWS on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Shaleas Harrison".

Shaleas Harrison
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