



April 10, 2017

Karen Taylor-Goodrich, Superintendent
North Cascades National Park Complex, National Park Service
810 State Route 20
Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284

Eric Rickerson, State Supervisor
Washington Fish and Wildlife Office, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1111 Washington St. S.E.
Olympia, WA 98501

Re: North Cascades Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan, Draft EIS Alternative C (FR Doc. 2017-00616)

Dear Superintendent Taylor-Goodrich and Supervisor Rickerson:

The grizzly bear is an iconic species of the Pacific Northwest, a resident of our landscape for thousands of years and a critical part of our regional heritage. Today, fewer than 10 grizzly bears are believed to remain in the 9,800-square-mile North Cascades recovery zone. Teetering on extinction, the mighty grizzly bear now depends on humans for its future and the actions we take now are critical.

As educators, advocates and protectors of the natural world, we at Northwest Trek Wildlife Park, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, and our parent organization – Metro Parks Tacoma – have long been committed to the conservation of native Northwest species such as the grizzly bear. Our grizzly bear exhibit opened at Northwest Trek in 1993, and since then we have shared our knowledge and worked to inspire millions of visitors to protect bears and the environment in which they live.

Reflecting that commitment, Northwest Trek Wildlife Park, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, and the Metro Parks Tacoma Board of Commissioners strongly support restoring a healthy population of grizzly bears to the North Cascades recovery zone, and we endorse **North Cascades Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan, Draft EIS Alternative C** with some minor enhancements.

Alternative C, “incremental restoration,” represents a responsible and productive means by which to gradually restore a viable grizzly population, drawing upon a model that has been used successfully elsewhere and striking a balance between the biological and social sciences of returning bears to the region. The number of bears involved, and the pace at which reintroduction

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would proceed, would restore the population most effectively by relying on scientific best practices and field expertise.

Alternative C recommends the appropriate amount of time needed for these slow reproducers to establish themselves in the North Cascades, and promotes a strong reintroduction plan to reach optimal population numbers for genetic diversity and long-term health. To ensure the success of Alternative C, we propose that additional bears be added as needed to cultivate positive population growth, while also relying on bear reproduction to make progress toward grizzly recovery over the next 60 to 100 years.

Alternative C is the best choice because it is neither too slow nor too fast in its process of bear selection and reintroduction, representing a middle ground among the methods proposed. It strikes a sound balance between the mutual goals of grizzly bear recovery and the needs of people and will help keep the Pacific Northwest a natural, sustainable place in which to live, work and play.

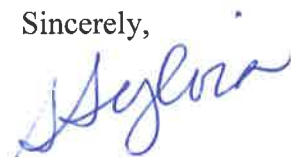
Grizzly bears are one of the great engineers of the natural world -- spreading seeds from plants, distributing marine and aquatic nutrients from fish, and helping to aerate soils at high elevations. Ensuring grizzly viability helps to ensure overall habitat viability for other species, including our own. This charismatic species also has an intrinsic conservation value. The presence of grizzly bears could attract more visitors to the North Cascades National Park, as has occurred at Yellowstone National Park, thus creating a boon for both the environment and local economies.

In endorsing Alternative C, we also want to specifically recommend against choosing Alternative A, the "no action" option, as that would lead to the extinction of the grizzly bear in the North Cascades. As we have outlined in this letter, the advantages of restoring the population far outweigh the potential outcome of doing nothing.

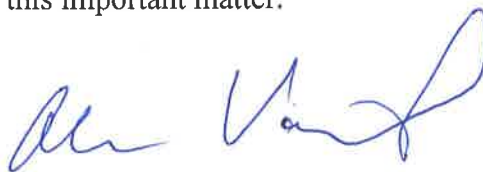
As you consider the extensive public comment from stakeholders, community members, and wildlife advocates, we strongly urge you to proceed with Alternative C and bring back this majestic species to the Pacific Northwest.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Shon Sylvia
Executive Director



Alan Varsik
Director, Zoological & Environmental Education
Northwest Trek Wildlife Park/Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium