

# INTRODUCTION TO A PANEL DISCUSSION: RECOVERY OF THREATENED GRIZZLY BEAR POPULATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA

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*Abstract:* A panel discussion on recovery of threatened grizzly bear populations in North America was held at the 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Bear Research and Management. Five panelists, representing U.S. and Canadian wildlife agencies and conservation organizations, shared their perspectives on grizzly bear recovery issues.

*Ursus 10:589*

**Key words:** conservation, education, endangered species, grizzly bear, recovery planning, threatened species, *Ursus arctos horribilis*.

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The purpose of this panel was to provide International Association for Bear Research and Management members with a review and synthesis of the U.S. grizzly bear recovery effort and to provide an opportunity for members to discuss the recovery program with panelists representing perspectives from universities, conservation organizations, and state, federal, and Canadian wildlife agencies. The U.S. grizzly bear recovery effort provides us with an important model in several respects. First, it gives us an opportunity to evaluate our effectiveness in conserving grizzly bears. It also provides a potential template for recovering other bear populations throughout the world. Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the U.S. grizzly recovery program is meaningful because if ever there was a time and place for success, it is here where we have the knowledge and technology as well as the affluence to plan and implement an effective conservation strategy for the future.

Recovery of the grizzly bear in the United States is one of the highest profile and most costly conservation programs in North America. Grizzly bear conservation in the contiguous 48 states has also had a contentious history, often framed with heated debate. However, when it comes to recovering grizzly bears, I believe we all share much more common ground than significant differences. Clearly, everyone's goal in the conservation community, including agency and university bear biologists and conservation leaders, is to conserve viable populations of grizzly bears in perpetuity. As you read each of the papers, you will see that much of the disagreement centers around details of the science and specific approaches to management. How much of this disagreement is critical to the recovery of grizzly bears over the long-term remains to be seen. Our success recovering grizzly bears will require more teamwork and cooperation, including setting aside personal disagreements and reconciling pro-

fessional differences in order to focus our efforts on the most substantive issues affecting bear conservation.

Most recovery panelists emphasized the importance of incorporating informed public involvement into grizzly bear recovery efforts. Panelists also recognized the significant challenges resource managers face in recovering grizzly bear populations and the need for adaptive management solutions as conditions evolve throughout the range of the grizzly bear. And our Canadian panelist appropriately noted that the future of grizzly bear populations in the contiguous states is inextricably linked with conservation of adjacent Canadian bear populations. Concern was expressed about timing of any delisting actions and the need for continuous, long-term conservation efforts for individual populations.

I drew several conclusions from each of the presentations and the following discussions. Grizzly bear conservation will become more, not less, difficult as development pressures intensify on our remaining wildlands. Teamwork and cooperation will be fundamental elements in any successful recovery effort. Where professional differences occur that substantively influence conservation strategies and public perceptions, bear biologists must try to reconcile their differences as much as possible. In some cases, this may require convening professionally facilitated workshops. Public support for grizzly bear conservation is critical. Natural resource agencies must reach out to incorporate citizen participation into grizzly bear conservation. No longer can we work independently and in isolation and expect the public to accept our management decisions. Finally, our success in conserving grizzly bears will depend more on our skills as public educators, landscape architects, and people managers than on traditional wildlife management. Our success in conserving the grizzly will have broad implications for ecosystem conservation in general.