

Rich Landers: Grizzly hunt would be wrong if it was only goal of ESA



Yellowstone-area grizzlies could come off endangered species list. (Associated Press)

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The Endangered Species Act gets favorable reviews for restoring bald eagles and other critters that don't take a large toll on our lives and emotions.

The 1973 act of Congress is much less respected when it paves way for wolves and grizzly bears to be removed from the endangered species list.

One camp complains that restoring these apex predators threatens game populations, livestock operations and, in some cases, people. Programs are being applied to help mitigate these concerns.

Meanwhile, animal activists are polar opposites who can't fathom a recovery goal that would enable wolves or grizzlies to be killed, especially by a hunter who might have the carcass mounted for a trophy room.

This grievance stems not from a threat to the species or someone's property, but to a preyed-upon state of mind.

While the anti-predator crowd lobbies for diluting the Endangered Species protections, the anti-hunting zealots also are a threat to the law's intent. Both factions thwart the wildlife management that leads to public coexistence with recovered species.

Leaving space in the world and our lives for nature as God designed it requires tolerance. Humans must make sacrifices, with some bearing more hardship than others.

Collectively we have have to be less selfish.

Gray wolves reintroduced to the Northern Rockies starting in 1995 exceeded all recovery goals and expectations in fewer than 15 years.

Yet animal rights groups were ready with a failed court challenge when the wolves were de-listed in 2009, even though Wyoming, Idaho and Montana had up to 10 times more wolves than the minimum they agreed to in the recovery plan.

The anti-hunters came out with all sorts of discredited claims that controlled hunting and trapping would disrupt the intricate social structure of wolf packs. The lengthy appeal diverted federal wildlife funds and staff time from dealing with wildlife that are legitimately imperiled.

Wolf populations are still seven times above the minimums allowed despite licensed hunting and trapping in Montana and Idaho.

Grizzly bears currently are proposed for de-listing in the Yellowstone region, bringing a similar howl of disapproval for success in species recovery.

The Seattle Times recently featured an op-ed column by Wayne Pacelle, notorious Yale president of the Humane Society of the United States.

The piece is headlined “Saving grizzly bears only to allow them to be hunted is wrong.”

The headline, at least, is factual thanks to the word ‘only.’ What Pacelle misses in his subsequent rant is that

- [hunting a few grizzlies](#) would be “only” a small chapter of the success story along with benefits to ecosystems and tourism.

Pacelle, the Donald Trump of animal activism, makes distorted claims aimed at the hearts, votes and checkbooks of gullible masses.

He claims that de-listing Yellowstone region grizzlies will translate into “unleashing trophy hunters to kill individuals from a ... still depleted population.”

Fact check: Hunters would not be “unleashed.” Any grizzly hunting would be on a limited basis with strict quotas and controls. And the Yellowstone region grizzly population is FAR from depleted.

The population of 700 or more grizzlies in the Yellowstone region far exceeds the federal recovery criteria.

Wildlife managers identify grizzlies in distinct populations. This allows de-listing of bears around Yellowstone even though grizzlies remain protected in the Idaho Selkirk Mountains where recovery is incomplete.

About 1,700 grizzly bears roam the West, with most in Montana and Wyoming. That’s about three times more grizzlies than in the 1970s when Chris Servheen became involved in grizzly research.

Servheen retired from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service last month after 35 years as the federal government’s first and only grizzly bear recovery coordinator.

A recovery plan for grizzlies was completed in 1981. The breakthrough in reviving the great bears came in 1983, when federal officials and state leaders did something almost taboo today – they decided to work together.

The feds joined Montana, Washington, Idaho and Wyoming to create the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, which is credited with launching the grizzly bear’s successful comeback.

Servheen says he has no personal interest in hunting grizzlies. “It would be like hunting family,” he told a Montana reporter. But he said he respects people with other opinions that don’t threaten the species.

The de-listing proposal, he said, has controls that limit the number of bears that could be killed by hunters in relationship to the overall populations and mortalities from other factors.

Hunters also could be aimed at problem grizzlies in some cases. Instead of spending taxpayer money for government employees euthanizing bears that threaten people or livestock, a hunter might pay for the privilege of doing the job.

Pacelle received \$372,023 in total compensation in 2015, according to Charity Navigator, to distort efforts of sportsmen and wildlife managers out on the ground working for wildlife.

Clearly it's cost effective to repeatedly send out urgent appeals that something dire is happening to wildlife – Please donate here! – even if it's an endangered species success story.

Pacelle the propagandist is paid about four times more than Servheen, whose hide was charred on all sides from the heat he took administering the science and social acceptance of grizzly recovery.

With that profit motive, anti-hunting zealots totally ignore the less-profitable issue of habitat protection as the major challenge ahead to keep grizzlies, wolves and other critters on the landscape.

Servheen sees private land development as the greatest threat to the grizzlies in the lower 48 states. Development is cutting off connectivity among populations and disrupting vital habitat, he said.

This is a rallying point for common causes, such as opposition to state campaigns to seize control over federal public lands, which would lead to more habitat fragmentation.

Protecting grizzly habitat will benefit a wide range of wildlife, as well as clean water and clean air. Protecting habitat is a win-win.

Grizzly de-listing is a rally call for hunters and anti-hunters to seek common ground.