

SUMMARY: This notice advises the public that the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) intends to gather information for the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the reintroduction of grizzly bears to the Bitterroot ecosystem of central Idaho and western Montana. A series of public scoping sessions pertaining to development of the EIS will be held. Notices of the dates, times, and locations of these public opportunities will be advertised in local publications prior to the event. This notice is being furnished as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations (40 CFR 1501.7) to obtain input from other agencies and the public on the scope of issues to be addressed in the EIS. Comments and participation in this scoping process will be solicited.

DATES: Written comments should be received by February 23, 1995.

ADDRESSES: Comments should be addressed to the Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 5127, Missoula, Montana 59806.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For further information contact Dr. Chris Servheen. (See **ADDRESSES** section) telephone 406/329-3223.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: A chapter has been prepared and appended to the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan that outlines reintroduction as the proposed method for recovery. Public involvement in the drafting of the chapter identified issues that include livestock depredation, effects on big game species/hunting, human health and safety, land use policy/restrictions, the role of the grizzly bear in the ecosystem (naturalness), economics, State and Federal authorities, private property rights, illegal killing/poaching, effects of grizzly bears on other species (such as listed salmon), and the size of the recovery area.

Preliminary alternatives suggested to date by the public include no action (natural recolonization from other populations), restriction of grizzly recovery to wilderness areas, grizzly recovery should include a very broad area, reintroduction of grizzly bears as an experimental population, and reintroduction of grizzly bears as a threatened species.

A scoping brochure is being prepared that details the EIS process, background information, issues identified to date, and how to become involved. Persons who previously requested grizzly recovery information will receive copies. Other interested people can obtain copies by writing to Bitterroot

Ecosystem Grizzly Bear EIS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 5127, Missoula, Montana 59806.

The Service, in cooperation with the Idaho Fish and Game Department, U.S. Forest Service, and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, is proposing to recover grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) in east-central Idaho and extreme western Montana by reintroducing them to the bitterroot Mountains area of Idaho. Introduced grizzly bears and their resultant offspring would be classified as nonessential experimental under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act (Act) of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) Proposed is the release of four to six bears per year for 5 years. All bears would be released within established wilderness boundaries in Idaho and would be comprised primarily of younger-aged animals. Bears with no previous known conflict with humans would be captured and moved to the area from either southeastern British Columbia or northwestern Montana. All released bears would be ear-tagged for individual identification and fitted with radio collars so their movements could be monitored. Bears would be located twice weekly (weather permitting) for the life of the radio collars (approximately 3 years). The current status and location of transplanted bears would be relayed weekly to the public through various media contacts. Any bear coming into conflict with people would be dealt with under protocol established by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee or under guidelines identified and included as special rules as stated in section 10(j) of the Act for experimental populations. Public participation in the writing of special rules that will govern both the grizzly bear and habitat management would be conducted and encouraged following NEPA guidelines. If approved, the relocation of grizzly bears should begin as early as 1996.

The grizzly bear was once a widespread inhabitant of the Bitterroot Ecosystem in central Idaho and western Montana. Grizzly bears were removed from the Bitterroot area by humans as they settled the West, primarily for the protection of livestock. The last documented grizzly bear was killed in the 1930's, although occasional, unverified reports persist. In 1975, the grizzly bear was listed as threatened in the 48 contiguous States under the Act, which directs Federal agencies to take necessary actions to recover threatened or endangered species. The recovery of grizzly bears in the Bitterroot ecosystem could potentially increase the number of

grizzly bears south of Canada by 30-35 percent. In addition, it could potentially provide an important genetic link for grizzly bears between the Cabinet/Yaak, Northern Continental Divide, and Yellowstone ecosystems.

The decision to be made includes whether to implement the proposed action as described above, whether to vary the method or number of bears to be relocated, determining the status under which grizzly bears will be recovered, determine the area in which recovery will be pursued or allowed to occur, and determine which special rules will be adopted as identified through the public participation process.

The Service estimates that the draft EIS will be available for public review and comment by December 1995.

Dated: December 29, 1994.

Ralph O. Morgenweck,
Regional Director, Region 6.
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Availability of an Environmental Assessment and Receipt of an Application for an Incidental Take Permit from Mr. D. Gregory Luce, in Baldwin County, AL

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: Mr. D. Gregory Luce (Applicant), has applied to the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) for an incidental take permit pursuant to Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Endangered Species Act (Act). The proposed permit would authorize for a period of 20 years the incidental take of an endangered species, the Alabama beach mouse (*Peromyscus polionotus ammobates*), known to occupy lands owned by the Applicant in Gulf Shores, Baldwin County, Alabama. The Application proposed to construct and use a single family residence on a 1.21-acre privately owned lot within the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge. The lot is located approximately 7.5 miles west of Gulf Shores, Alabama, at Pine Beach, near the western end of Little Lagoon, between the lagoon and the Gulf shoreline.

The Service also announces the availability of an environmental assessment (EA) and habitat conservation plan (HCP) for the incidental take application. Copies of the EA or HCP may be obtained by making requests to the addresses below. The Service is soliciting data on *Peromyscus polionotus ammobates* in