

TESTIMONY TO SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE

“THE GREATER YELLOWSTONE ECOSYSTEM GRIZZLY BEAR: A HALTED SUCCESS STORY UNDER THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT”

September 9, 2020

Good morning, my name is Chuck Roady and I am the Vice President & General Manager of F.H. Stoltze Land & Lumber Company in Columbia Falls, Montana. We are the oldest private family owned forest products manufacturer and timberland owner in Montana. Mr. Stoltze, our founder, came west with the building of the Great Northern Railroad in the 1890's and incorporated Stoltze Land & Lumber in 1912. I am a natural resource manager by education, with a BS Forest Management in 1975 from the University of Idaho and I have over 44 years of working in the forest products industry in the western US. During the course of my career I have served as a leader on multiple boards all related to the management of natural resources and wildlife. These board roles include two terms on the Softwood Lumber Board, ten years on the board and committees of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, [the last two years as Board Chairman], I was appointed by Idaho Governor Batt in 1995 as the first private industry / non-government member of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, I'm the current Chairman of the Federal Forest Resource Coalition, and appointed in 2019 to Montana Governor Bullock's Grizzly Bear Advisory Council.

The subject of Grizzly Bear management is an emotionally charged issue, especially in the states of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming that encompass the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Everyone has their own opinions on how they believe grizzly bears should be managed, much of that opinion is based on where you live and if you are a rancher, farmer, timberland owner, a sportsman, an outfitter, or a recreational user of public lands. As a natural resource manager of private lands and purchaser of many government forest management contracts I have had to deal with the balance of managing grizzly bears and other wildlife species with the sustainable multiple uses of our lands and resources throughout my career. That management balance is often a difficult line to walk and always controversial, but has taught and convinced me beyond any doubt that grizzly bears must be managed just as are our other wildlife species.

There is absolutely no question in my mind that the Grizzly Bear in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) deserves and needs to be delisted from the Endangered Species List, and the sooner the better. I adamantly disagree with the decisions of the Federal District Court and more recently that of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals of keeping the bear listed under the ESA. This is another sad case of judicial review by philosophically biased judges not heeding the work, years of research, and recommendations of trained biologists. We as a society and citizens of the US and the respective States of the GYE need to recognize and celebrate the successful implementation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the work of hundreds of experts to achieve that success! The litigation halting the delisting process in the GYE is having a negative implication on the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) in central and northern Montana. The NCDE also needs to be delisting the grizzly bear as it has an incredibly high number of grizzlies and an ever-expanding population far beyond the recovery area boundaries.

We must enthusiastically illustrate to the American people that the efforts and work of agency biologists, land managers, farmers, ranchers, wildlife conservation groups, and sportsmen has culminated in a success story of recovering the grizzly bear to the GYE. Both for the benefit of humans, our society, and for the grizzly bear, the grizzly needs to be delisted and managed by the states and follow the successful North American Wildlife Model management system. The delisting process and the handing over the management of a species to the States does not happen in a vacuum. The states have a significant number of very experienced biologists and wildlife managers at their disposal to manage grizzly bears and all the other native large predator species. The success story of state management following delisting is demonstrated in the classic example of the gray wolf. We have more wolves today and in far more habitats than when it was delisted, all under management by the respective states.

I have worked cruising timber, hiked, camped, and hunted for many years in Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and Alaska and I can tell you that there are very few experiences more intimidating than that of a confrontation with a grizzly bear when walking through the forest, thick brush, or grasslands. I can also attest without question there is generally a very distinctive difference in the reaction of bears and other predators in areas where hunting is an integral part of the management of the wildlife. I have been very fortunate over the years to have not had an experience with a grizzly bear that resulted than anything more than having the crap scared out of me and having my plans for the entire day altered. In my experience those bears that are regularly accustomed to being around humans without a hunting component, such as in Yellowstone National Park, behave very differently than bears that are in areas where they are subjected to hunting. A closely regulated and continuously monitored hunting season for grizzly bears has been proven to be a very valuable management tool.

Every single day I worry about the safety of the foresters and contractors whom work for our company on a regular basis while they are out in the forest, which is effectively now all grizzly bear habitat. There was a forest worker killed by a grizzly bear in September 2014 near Dubois, Wyoming and the list continues to grow of similar instances of woods workers - grizzly bear conflicts. I am equally concerned for the safety and the liability for the members of the general public who recreate on these lands, the hunters, the outfitters, the berry pickers, the firewood cutters, and the list goes on of the users of the forest lands. Many of you are aware of the fatality of a hunting guide killed by a grizzly in northwest Wyoming in September of 2018, these cases of grizzly – human interactions are becoming all too common. I am not naïve enough for a second to believe if we delist the grizzly bear that these interactions will be alleviated, but I do believe that if the bear is delisted and actively managed by the States that the number and frequency of these incidents could be greatly reduced. Implementing a more hands-on management by state predator managers while allowing a regulated hunting season will most certainly help mitigate and provide more opportunities to avoid many of these conflicts.

The ranchers and farmers whom live and work their livestock in areas where grizzly bears roam and continue to expand their range suffer tremendous economic losses due to depredation by grizzly bears. Hearing the stories from the ranchers whom participated with me on the Montana Grizzly Bear Advisory Council was quite real and definitely shocking. The concerns of these landowners ranged from losing 25% of the current year calf or lamb crop, having grizzlies trample their grain fields and eat out of their storage bins, to even several families being afraid to let their kids play outside in the yard. Again, delisting the bear will not eliminate these problems and economic losses, but it is sure as heck a step in the right direction to minimizing them by having the states more proactively manage the bear.

The United States needs to delist the grizzly bear from the ESA and recognize our success in recovering the species, while managing it just as we do other wildlife species. We will gain far greater support for the provisions of the Endangered Species Act from those of us who reside here, make our living, raise our families, and recreate in and around the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem as well as the other areas in the West where grizzly bears roam. We, the residents all live, work, and play here because we like it here and grizzly bears are part of that equation that appeals to us, but they must be managed in a reasonable and prudent manner. The first step to being managed is delisting.

Thank you for your time and attention to listen to my testimony. I would welcome any questions from the Committee.