



## BEAR CONSERVATION

### **An Update on the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Population by Annabella Helman**



*Grizzly in Yellowstone National Park, USA (NPS)*

#### **Background**

The grizzlies in Yellowstone National Park are known for being a part of an isolated population as they are cut off from other grizzly populations in Glacier National Park and Canada. This poses a threat to the population even though their individual numbers have risen exponentially. An isolated population means limited gene flow among the bears which has the potential to bring about future extirpation - or local extinction - of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) population.

#### **Revealing Research**

As mentioned in the previous article regarding genetic drift within the Yellowstone grizzly population, The Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team (IGBST) has conducted decades of research that confirms the success of the GYE grizzlies.

Recently, IGBST has revealed that male grizzlies of not only the Yellowstone population, but the Glacier population as well, have begun to roam farther in recent decades to stake out new territories. The range of both populations has expanded significantly just in the past year and, if this pattern of expansion continues, we could, according to the predictions of IGBST, be seeing a reconnection of populations in the next 5 or 10 years.

### **Considering a Corridor**

While much of the land between these parks is publicly owned, there is a large risk that human activity and encroachment will have negative effects on the hopeful, natural reunification of grizzly populations. From waste to pet food, bears are attracted to the smells that humans create. Grizzlies are naturally curious and are tempted to follow their powerful noses. The problem this creates is that the bears are then attracted to human activity and can not be corralled or kept within an arbitrary border.

A solution, however, is to designate a large swath of wild land that has bear travel and activity in mind. Wildlife corridors, used to reconnect fragmented and isolated species, have been proven to be extremely effective in their mitigation of wildlife extirpations caused by human activity. The grizzly is a prime candidate for the new designation of a wildlife corridor and would benefit greatly in terms of population growth and, most importantly, an increase in genetic diversity and strength within the population.

IGBST is continuing to monitor the movement of grizzlies as they roam further from their original territories and the team has begun lobbying for the installment of a wildlife corridor, but, for the moment, the future for the Yellowstone grizzly population is bright.

### **More Information**

See also “Yellowstone grizzly population diversity” Diversity within a species is vital. One disease could wipe out a significant proportion of the population should it have low variance in gene types. To have genetic diversity is to have a strong population. [Download the article here.](#)