



July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Montana Grizzly Bear Advisory Council,

The Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y) is dedicated to connecting and protecting one of the last ecologically intact mountain ecosystems in the world, so people and nature can thrive. To achieve this vision, we have worked with over 400 diverse partners in the US and Canada. Y2Y is a science-based organization, and much of our work in the US focuses on reconnecting grizzly bear populations through protecting public and private lands, supporting good public lands management, making highways safer for people and wildlife, and reducing conflicts between people and wildlife.

We appreciate the council's hard work and dedication to this process and recognize the value of a diverse group coming together and finding solutions to tough issues. Your recommendations will likely influence statewide, and possibly federal policies affecting grizzly bears, and the people who live, work, and recreate among them. The council has a unique opportunity to set priorities for connectivity, conflict reduction, and public and private land management. We are encouraged by your progress thus far, and believe in your collective ability to bring a set of effective recommendations forward by this fall.

Our team has reviewed the draft recommendations put forth by the council and overall, we believe the council is on the right track and discussing very important, and sometimes difficult, issues. Below we outline the recommendations Y2Y supports from the working group draft framework documents (first and second drafts). Our recommendations are focused on transportation, public lands, private lands, and conflict reduction. Thank you for considering these comments as the council develops recommendations for grizzly bear management in Montana.

#### Grizzly Bear Management

First, we support the recommendation that Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) develop a statewide management plan for grizzly bears that incorporates areas of protected public lands and areas that promote connectivity. The health and long-term vitality of grizzly bears in Montana relies on grizzly bear populations being connected across the state. In order for this to be achieved, bears must have the ability to move safely across large areas, often near where people live. This presents challenges and opportunities. We are happy to explore opportunities to ensure that areas are permeable in a way that works for Montana communities and wildlife.

We support the recommendation to develop and update bear translocation protocols that support connectivity. This would include using best available science to define areas of high conservation value within Montana and areas that facilitate reconnecting grizzly bear populations in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, and allowing bear managers to relocate grizzlies into these areas in a way that is safe and appropriate. In these areas, connectivity would be proactively encouraged through management actions, monitoring, and public communications.

### Transportation

We support the recommendation to increase collaboration between Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHA) to develop wildlife crossings where roadways are a barrier to grizzly bear populations reconnecting. This should be coordinated with the Montana Wildlife and Transportation Steering Committee's efforts. To be most effective, we recommend identification of priority areas for improving grizzly bear safe wildlife passage across highways, support for infrastructure that allows grizzly bears to safely cross highways, consideration of private land conservation to increase the effectiveness of wildlife crossings, and funding for wildlife crossing structures and maintenance. Some version of this recommendation was included in the draft framework documents produced by all five working groups, and we hope to see strong consensus on this recommendation from the council moving forward.

Y2Y can help implement transportation projects through engaging experts to help design transportation projects, and by providing resources to achieve wildlife and human safety objectives in transportation. Y2Y has been involved in successfully developing and implementing wildlife crossings and other safe passage projects across the region.

### Private Lands

We encourage the council to support private land conservation by working with willing landowners in areas important for maintaining connectivity or reconnecting grizzly bear populations, and to support funding mechanisms and incentive programs for private land conservation in areas key for connectivity. In these areas, Y2Y may be able to help raise funds necessary for permanent protections on private lands. We have experience successfully raising funds and working with land trusts and willing landowners to conserve private land linkages in the US and Canada.

### Conflict Reduction

We encourage the council to support providing additional resources to grizzly bear information, education, and outreach (IE&O) efforts. This includes a long term and reliable funding source for these efforts. We also support the creation of standardized language, practices, and tools around grizzly bear IE&O. This would eliminate the amount of unique and sometimes conflicting information available, and provide a consistent message to hunters, recreationists, landowners, and others spending time in bear habitat to help reduce conflicts between people and grizzly bears.

We would also like to see the council support full funding for bear management specialists and technicians, so that important outreach and education work in Montana communities continues and expands where needed. Funding for these positions will allow managers to effectively, efficiently, and quickly address conflicts when they occur, and preemptively prevent conflicts from happening. This includes creating new, fulltime, funded positions where needed.

At the residential level, we support a recommendation to establish consistent state-wide community guidelines and protocols for keeping urban and residential areas free from conflicts with bears, including an incentive program that encourages Montana communities to join a program that helps cities and towns abide by these guidelines. We also recommend creating an incentive program for increasing participation from individual landowners who live in communities that have not yet adopted the program.

Similarly, we support recommending development of a bear aware/smart tourism and recreation plan that celebrates grizzly bear recovery and addresses conflict zones. This plan should address appropriate management tools for maintaining responsible recreation activities in grizzly bear habitat. This could be implemented through FWP and in partnership with the Montana Office of Tourism, Travel and Vacation. We also recommend this plan include guidelines for short-term vacation rentals. We

see a potential opportunity for FWP and/or the Office of Tourism to partner with companies such as Airbnb and VRBO on this effort.

We also support providing homeowners and rental agencies with access to agencies and nonprofit groups who can assist with implementing tools to bear-proof attractants.

At the municipal level, we support a recommendation to create sanitation and waste guidelines for municipalities, including requiring municipalities to secure garbage containers and waste transfer stations.

#### Public Lands

On public lands, we support standardizing all food storage requirements across state and federal lands in Montana. This could come through a recommendation by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC).

We also support the increased protection of large intact habitat areas on public lands, including roadless areas.

#### Science and Funding

We would like to see the council consider two additional recommendations related to science and funding. First, that the state of Montana works collaboratively with other stakeholders to assess and establish new funding mechanisms to support grizzly bear conservation and management, including funding for conserving private lands important to connecting grizzly bear populations. Second, to support further research on linkage areas between Montana and Central Idaho, and research on which communities will most likely face conflicts in the near future as grizzly bear populations expand.

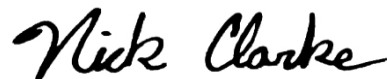
Y2Y is a partnership organization, and we understand that working together is key for achieving conservation at a scale that matters to nature. For each of these recommendations, where appropriate, our organization would enthusiastically help with fundraising, capacity building, and bringing together experts to address these issues. We know there are many agencies, groups, and individuals across Montana who care deeply about grizzly bears and protecting our way of life while living with grizzly bears. If we all come together, we can make a lasting, positive change for the health and vitality of Montana communities and the ecosystems in which we live.

Thank you for considering these comments. If you have any questions or would like to discuss further, please reach out to either of us.

Sincerely,



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