

Public Opinion Survey about state management of grizzly bears and wolves in the Northern Rockies



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Executive Summary

The U.S. will remove some populations of grizzly bears and all Northern Rocky Mountain wolves from the federal list of threatened and endangered species by early 2008. This move will return management of these species to individual states.



If state wildlife managers are unable to balance the interests of the general public and interest groups, such as livestock producers, hunters, or animal welfare groups, they may face significant resistance to management efforts. By contrast, if state wildlife managers can find ways to balance species conservation and human needs, they could engage citizen co-management and avoid possible federal re-listing of grizzlies and wolves. In other situations, combining public opinion with wildlife science has generated management strategies that had not been identified previously. Here we report on public opinion about future grizzly bear and wolf policy and management in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming.

We mailed a two-page survey to residents of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. We received completed surveys from 421 people for a final response rate of 42.7%. Our respondents were stratified by whether they lived within the known breeding range of wolves or grizzlies (WITHIN) or they lived adjacent to these zip codes (ADJACENT). These respondents differed in many ways, in addition to their locations (Appendix 1).

Support for wolf / grizzly conservation

Supporters of grizzly conservation outnumbered supporters of wolf conservation in our sample but both were a minority. Only 23% called themselves wolf supporters whereas 31% called themselves grizzly supporters. These groups overlapped highly: 94% of wolf supporters were also grizzly supporters whereas only 70% of grizzly supporters reported being wolf supporters. The 38% responding not a wolf supporter but not opposed to wolf conservation were matched by 38% responding opposed to wolf conservation. The 49% responding not a grizzly supporter but not opposed to grizzly conservation outnumbered the 31% calling themselves grizzly supporters and the 20% opposed to grizzly conservation. Respondents from zip codes WITHIN the known breeding range of grizzlies and wolves were less opposed to wolf / grizzly conservation (29% opposed wolf conservation, 15% opposed grizzly conservation) than those living in ADJACENT zip codes (49% opposed wolf conservation, 25% opposed grizzly conservation). The three states did not differ in wolf support or opposition. However, MT had significantly more grizzly supporters (39%), than ID (23%) or WY (32%).

Funding for wolf / grizzly management under state authority

Respondents preferred the following three sources of funding for wolf management if their state assumed full responsibility (in order of decreasing preference): voluntary contributions (58%), federal funding should continue (56%), and fees applied to hunters and trappers (54%). The same question applied to grizzlies yielded similar results, but the first two sources switched positions in preference. Preference for funding wolf management from federal funding and voluntary contributions was lower in respondents from ADJACENT zip codes. Although low in popularity overall (29%), state income tax voluntary check-off was preferred more by respondents from zip codes WITHIN known breeding range; this source of revenue was also significantly less popular among respondents from WY. Few respondents expressed a willingness to contribute time or funds to help reduce risk of conflicts between people and grizzlies / wolves or to support financial incentive to land-owners who tolerate wolves or grizzlies using their private property (<4% volunteer time, <10% financial). Those who expressed willingness offered \$4-10 on average and those volunteering time offered an average of 17 days.

Sources of information about wolves and grizzlies

Respondents most commonly reported four sources of information about wolves and grizzlies (in order of decreasing frequency): news media, word of mouth, associations literature (e.g., agricultural producers, wildlife conservation groups, hunters groups, etc.) and state wildlife management agencies or US Fish & Wildlife Service websites and written materials. These four most common remained the same regardless of the respondent's state or zip code, although their order differed somewhat. Respondents from zip codes WITHIN known breeding range of the carnivores reported more use of scientific literature and official presentations at public meetings than did other respondents. Few state differences emerged. Most of our respondents (74%) did not report any losses/damage to wolves or grizzlies in the last 5 years. Among the remainder, the most common type was threat to person/family (11%), followed by other (10%), and killed/injured livestock (7%). Forty-one respondents checked the other category, 11 of which constituted lost sleep, time or security, and 30 constituted lost hunting opportunities. There were no significant differences between zip codes for any losses. The three states differed significantly in proportions of respondents reporting none. WY and ID respondents reported other loss/damage more often than respondents from MT. WY respondents reported threats to Person/Family loss/damage more than those from ID or MT.

Conflict management

Respondents endorsement for grizzly removal (capture, relocate, or destroy) declined with the apparent severity of the grizzly's interaction with people or their property. Support for removal of a grizzly bear was higher for private lands scenarios than on public lands scenarios. Overall, scenarios without explicit loss of livestock or property generated less approval for removal by state agencies; in five out of six of these scenarios, respondents from ADJACENT zip codes had significantly higher approval for removal than those from zip codes WITHIN known breeding ranges. ID respondents more often endorsed removal of grizzlies. When asked about management of unsupervised livestock, most respondents favored removal of grizzlies or wolves from private lands. Next most popular was non-lethal methods of supervising and protecting livestock, followed by offer educational materials to explain risks to livestock producers, with least approval for removal of unsupervised livestock from public lands after a loss. Respondents from zip codes WITHIN known breeding range of wolves and grizzlies endorsed non-lethal methods, educational materials and removal of livestock significantly more often than did respondents from ADJACENT zip codes. The latter endorsed removal of grizzlies or wolves from private lands significantly more often. WY respondents endorsed removal of grizzlies or wolves from private lands significantly more often than did respondents from MT and somewhat more than respondents from ID. In six of eight scenarios involving potential conflict with wolves or grizzlies, more respondents endorsed authorities should capture and relocate the [wolf or grizzly] to a wilderness area than endorsed three other possible management actions, but the former option never won majority approval. In the other two scenarios, more respondents endorsed authorities should kill the [wolf or grizzly]; this never achieved a majority either. The strongest majority for any one management action was 49% approval for lethal control if a wolf kills or injures livestock on private land. The action authorities should take no immediate action toward the wolf, but monitor the situation never achieved better than 26% approval. The option authorities should frighten the grizzly away or deter it... got <17% approval. Overall, non-lethal efforts won majority approval in all eight scenarios, if you add up support for relocation, deterrence and monitoring (see precise wording above), but non-lethal management received less support when wolves were involved, than when grizzlies were involved (wolves 51%-70% approval depending on the scenario; grizzlies: 61-78%).

Hunting of wolves and grizzlies

Approval for a public hunting/trapping season on wolves and grizzlies was high. For wolves, 46% of respondents wanted the season immediately (33% for grizzlies). Qualified support for hunting/trapping under two contingencies accounted for most of the remaining respondents (42% for wolves and 51% for grizzlies). This question and the subsequent one indicated few respondents were completely opposed to hunting/trapping wolves and grizzlies (12-13% and 16-17% respectively). Almost one third of respondents opposed any restrictions on hunting wolves. Almost one-quarter of respondents felt the same about hunting grizzlies. The most popular restrictions were hunting by state residents only (31% for wolves, 29% for grizzlies), no hunting with traps or bait (29%, 30% respectively) and no hunting with dogs (25% each).

Recommendations

State wildlife planners may find these data helpful for the design of future wolf or grizzly policy and management actions. We expect policies and management actions with broader public support will face less opposition in courts, ballot boxes, hearings, and on the ground. As in other regions, such as Wisconsin, support for public hunting of wolves or grizzlies was strong in this study, particularly when conditional on sustainability or conflict-reduction. In the management of property damage or threats of such damage by wolves or grizzlies, lethal control and capture and relocation vied for most popular intervention, depending on scenarios we presented, the location of respondents, and

the hypothetical conflicts. Non-lethal options generally won greater support in this study. Tolerance for wolves and grizzlies appeared lower for private lands scenarios than for public lands scenarios. Willingness to support management financially or with volunteer time whatever action might be taken was rarer than support for wolf or grizzly conservation. Our respondents endorsed continued federal funding despite numerous references to states taking over authority. They also endorsed voluntary contributions as a source of funding.