



Draft Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan / Environmental Impact Statement

NORTH CASCADES ECOSYSTEM

Photo Credit S. Senger

Newsletter | January 2017

Dear Friends,

The National Park Service (NPS) and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) are pleased to announce the availability of the Draft Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (draft EIS) for the North Cascades Ecosystem.

Early in this process, we asked for your input on our stated goals for the plan, and the issues which could arise through its implementation. Using the feedback we received during that initial public scoping effort, and input from an interagency planning team, we developed a range of restoration alternatives and analyzed the potential impacts of those alternatives. All of this information is now presented for your review in the draft EIS.

The draft EIS is available for public review and comment through March 14, 2017. During the public comment period, we will be hosting a series of open house and virtual public meetings. See p. 6 for full details. The full draft EIS is available at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grizzlydeis>.

The goal of the public review period is to gather comments from individuals, groups, and agencies regarding the draft EIS' adequacy in addressing the purpose, need, and objectives, range of alternatives considered, environmental issues of concern and the

sufficiency of the environmental impact analysis. Your comments will assist the FWS and NPS in revising and finalizing the EIS.

Thank you for your support and interest in this important issue.

Karen Taylor-Goodrich, Superintendent
North Cascades National Park Service Complex

Eric Rickerson, State Supervisor, Washington Fish and Wildlife Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Restoring grizzly bears to the North Cascades Ecosystem would enhance the probability of long-term survival and conservation of grizzly bears in the contiguous United States, thereby contributing to overall grizzly bear recovery and greater biodiversity of the ecosystem. The return of a self-sustaining population of grizzly bears to the North Cascades would bode well for the ecosystem; an ecosystem capable of supporting grizzly bears – complete with healthy vegetation and prey populations, and secure, remote habitat – is also capable of supporting the other species that call this ecosystem home.

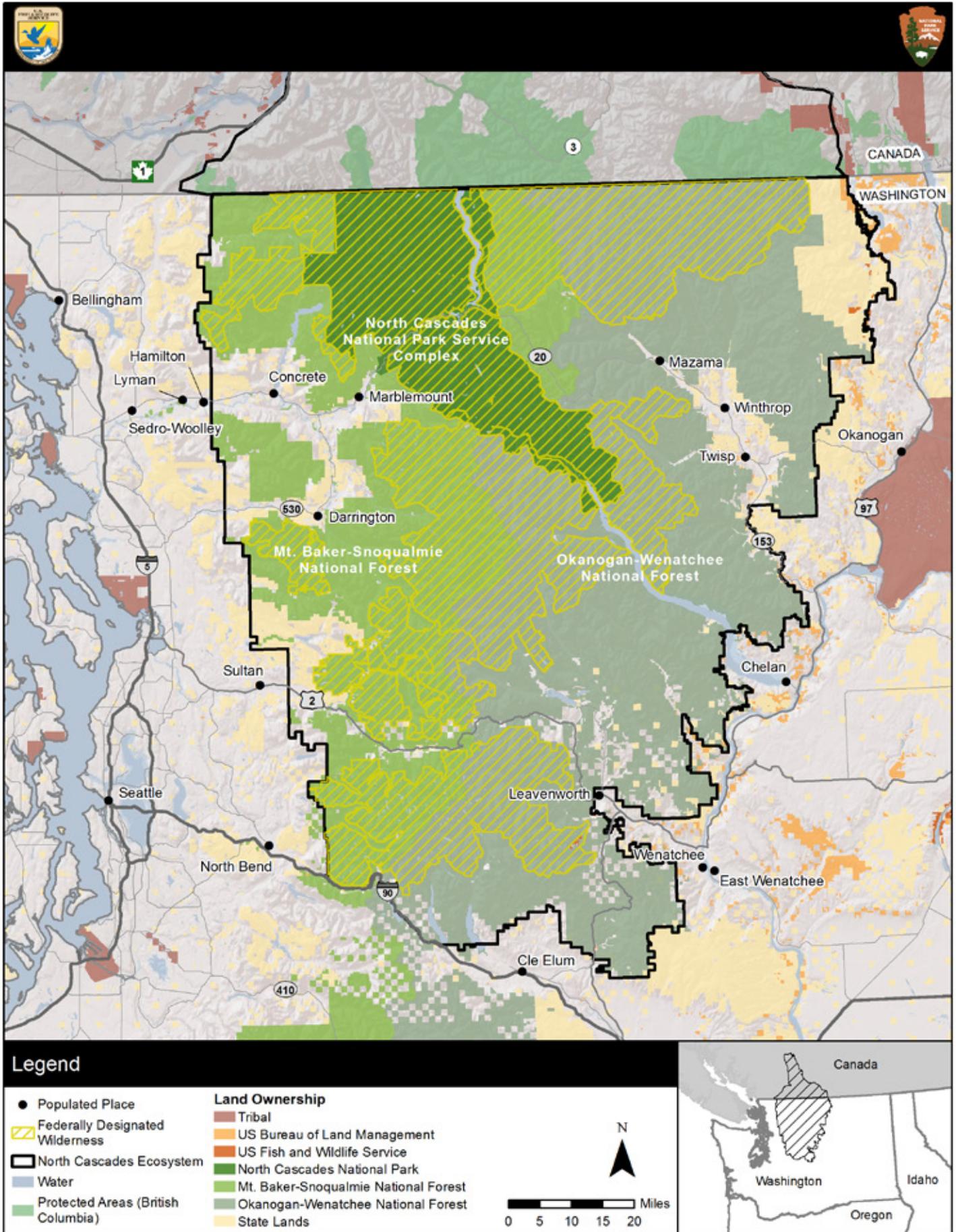


Figure 1. North Cascades Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone

Background

The greater North Cascades Ecosystem (NCE) constitutes a large block of contiguous habitat that spans the international border between the United States and Canada. The U.S. portion of the NCE spans the crest of the Cascade Range and comprises one of the most intact wildlands in the contiguous U.S. The NCE includes the North Cascades National Park Service Complex, including the Stephen Mather Wilderness, and the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie and Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. A map of the NCE is provided in Figure 1 and depicts the distribution of the various U.S. federal lands that comprise much of the area within the NCE grizzly bear recovery zone.

Research indicates this wilderness landscape is capable of supporting a self-sustaining grizzly bear population. The overall population status of the grizzly bear in the greater NCE is unknown; however, it is highly unlikely that the NCE contains a viable grizzly bear population. There have been only four confirmed detections of grizzly bears in the greater NCE in the past 10 years, all of which occurred in British Columbia and may comprise only two individuals. Given the low number of grizzly bears, very slow reproductive rate and other recovery constraints, the grizzly bear in the NCE was found by the FWS to be warranted for uplisting to endangered status, but was precluded by higher-priority listings.

The draft EIS evaluates the effects of alternatives for grizzly bear restoration, including potential impacts on wildlife and fish (including grizzly bears), wilderness character, visitor use and recreational experience, public and employee safety, socioeconomics, and ethnographic resources.

For more information about the project visit:

**[http://parkplanning.nps.gov/
grizzlydeis](http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grizzlydeis)**.

What is the Purpose and Need of the EIS?

The purpose of the EIS is to determine how to restore the grizzly bear to the NCE, a portion of its historical range.

Because the NCE grizzly bears are at risk of local extinction, action is needed at this time to:

- Avoid the permanent loss of grizzly bears in the NCE.
- Contribute to the restoration of biodiversity of the ecosystem for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations of people.
- Enhance the probability of long-term survival of grizzly bears in the NCE and thereby contribute to overall grizzly bear recovery.
- Support the recovery of the grizzly bear to the point where it can be removed from the federal list of threatened and endangered wildlife species.

What are the Objectives in Taking Action?

Objectives are more specific statements of purpose that provide additional bases for comparing the effectiveness of alternatives in achieving the desired outcomes of an action. The objectives of this EIS are to:

- Restore a grizzly bear population as part of the natural and cultural heritage of the North Cascades.
- Provide Pacific Northwest residents and visitors with the opportunity to again experience grizzly bears in their native habitat.
- Seek to support Tribal cultural and spiritual values, as well as environmental and natural resource objectives related to the grizzly bear.
- Expand outreach efforts to inform and involve the public, and build understanding about grizzly bear recovery.



Photo Credit C. Brindle

What are the Alternatives under Consideration?

The *National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)* requires federal agencies to explore a range of alternatives and analyze impacts that any reasonable alternatives could have on the human environment. The alternatives under consideration must also include a “no-action” alternative. Action alternatives carried forward for detailed analysis must meet the purpose of and need for taking action. The draft EIS analyzes four alternatives.

Alternative A: Continuation of Existing Grizzly Bear Management (No Action)

Under alternative A (no action), existing management practices would be followed and no new management actions would be implemented. Options for grizzly bear restoration under the no-action alternative would be limited. Management actions would be focused on improved sanitation, poaching control, motorized access management, outreach and educational programs to provide information

about grizzly bears and grizzly bear recovery to the public, and research and monitoring to determine grizzly bear presence, distribution, habitat, and home ranges. Based on the Revised Code of Washington 77.12.035, alternative A is the only alternative being evaluated in detail that would allow for the full participation by the state of Washington.

Elements Common to All Action Alternatives

All of the action alternatives would seek to restore a self-sustaining population of 200 bears through the capture and release of grizzly bears into the NCE. Each of the action alternatives would involve a similar approach to the capture, transport, and release of grizzly bears; enhanced public education and outreach; guidelines for management actions to respond to human-grizzly bear conflicts; and a similar approach for the replacement or additional releases of grizzly bears, access management, and habitat management. Grizzly bears would likely be supplied from areas in northwestern Montana or south-central British Columbia. Any released bears lost to mortality or emigration would be replaced.

Alternative B—Ecosystem Evaluation Restoration

Under alternative B, NPS and FWS would implement an ecosystem evaluation approach to grizzly bear restoration, wherein a total of up to ten grizzly bears would be released at a single remote site on NPS or U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands in the NCE over two consecutive summers. The grizzly bears released during the first two years (years 1 and 2) would be monitored for an additional two years (years 3 and 4) for habitat use and instances of human conflict. In the fourth year, a decision would be made regarding how restoration would proceed during subsequent years. Depending on the results of monitoring information, NPS and FWS may choose to repeat the initial release, where an additional ten bears would be released at a single site over two years followed by two additional years of monitoring. Alternatively, NPS and FWS could decide to transition to Alternative C.

Alternative C—Incremental Restoration

Under alternative C, NPS and FWS would release approximately five to seven grizzly bears into the NCE each year over roughly five to ten years, with a goal of establishing an initial population of 25 grizzly bears. Grizzly bears would be released at multiple remote sites on NPS and USFS lands, which would be located in close proximity to one another in order to facilitate interaction and breeding among grizzly bears released into the ecosystem. After the initial population of 25 grizzly bears has been reached, additional bears would likely be released into the ecosystem every few years in order to address mortality, population and demographic trends, genetic limitations, distribution, or to adjust the population's sex ratio to improve reproductive success. Alternative C would be expected to result in the achievement of the restoration goal of approximately 200 grizzly bears within 60 to 100 years.

Alternative D—Expedited Restoration

Under alternative D, the NPS and FWS would seek to expedite grizzly bear restoration by releasing additional grizzly bears into the NCE over time until the restoration goal is reached. This alternative would not limit the primary restoration phase to 25 animals and would

not set a limit for the number of grizzly bears released into the NCE. Rather, the number of suitable grizzly bears captured in a given year would be released—likely 5 to 7 bears. Capture and release efforts would continue each year as necessary until a combination of release efforts and reproduction results in a population of approximately 200 grizzly bears on the landscape. Similar to alternative C, grizzly bears would be released at multiple remote sites on NPS and USFS lands based on habitat criteria. Upon achievement of the restoration goal under alternative D, subsequent releases would be unlikely. Alternative D would be expected to result in the achievement of the restoration goal of approximately 200 grizzly bears within roughly 25 years.

Endangered Species Act Section 10(j) Designation Rulemaking Option

Grizzly bears released into the NCE would be managed as threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) under all action alternatives. However, an option would be available under any of the action alternatives in accordance with a special rulemaking to designate grizzly bears in the U.S. portion of the NCE as a 10(j) experimental population under section 10 of the ESA. An experimental population is a group of reintroduced plants or animals that is geographically isolated from other populations of the species that is typically determined to be “essential” or “nonessential” to the survival of the species as a whole but contributes to their recovery. Section 10(j) provides for the reintroduction of experimental populations under special regulations and may include protective regulations established under authority of section 4(d) of the ESA.

Preferred alternative

At this time, there is not a preferred alternative. Input from the public is encouraged and all public comments received on the draft EIS will be evaluated and considered in the identification of the preferred alternative, which will be included in the final EIS.



Photo Credit M. Rochetta



Photo Credit S. Rochetta

Public Meeting Schedule

All public meetings will be from 6PM to 8PM Pacific Time. Meetings will be an open-house format, and present the same information. There will not be a formal presentation or hearing. A series of short informational videos will be available for viewing during the entire open house and informational

displays will be arranged throughout the room. Representatives from FWS, NPS, USFS and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will be available to answer your questions about the draft EIS and NEPA process. You may submit written comments at the public meetings.

DATE	TOWN/CITY	LOCATION	ADDRESS
February 13	Cle Elum	Putnam Centennial Center	719 E. 3rd Street Cle Elum, WA 98922
February 14	Cashmere	Cashmere Riverside Center	201 Riverside Drive Cashmere, WA 98815
February 15	Winthrop	Red Barn	51 WA-20 Winthrop, WA 98862
February 16	Omak	Okanogan County Fairgrounds Annex Facility	175 Rodeo Trail Okanogan, WA 98840
February 21	Bellingham	Oxford Suites	4051 Meridian Street Bellingham, WA 98226
February 22	Darrington	Darrington Community Center	570 Sauk Avenue Darrington, WA 98241
February 23	Sultan	Sultan Senior High School	13715 310th Avenue SE Sultan, WA 98294
February 24	Renton	Renton Community Center	715 Maple Valley Highway Renton, WA 98057

For those unable to attend the open house meetings, there will also be an opportunity to participate in virtual public meetings (webinars). Webinars are scheduled for Tuesday, February 14th from 11AM-1PM Pacific Time and Sunday, February 26th from 5PM-7PM Pacific Time. The information presented on the webinars will be the same as that presented at the open houses.

Questions

For additional information about the open house meetings and to register for the webinars, visit: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grizzlydeis> and click on the "Meetings" link. Contact Denise Shultz, Public Information Officer, North Cascades National Park Service Complex at 360-854-7302, or Ann Froschauer, Public Affairs Supervisor, FWS Washington Fish and Wildlife Office at 360-753-4370.

How to Comment

The draft EIS will be open for public comment through March 14, 2017. You may submit comments in one of the following ways:

- 1. Submit comments electronically at:**
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grizzlydeis>.
- 2. Mail or hand deliver comments to:**
Superintendent
North Cascades National Park Service Complex
810 State Route 20 Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284
- 3. Attend a public meeting and submit a written comment**

Comments will not be accepted by fax, e-mail, or in any other manner than those specified above. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Photo Credit C. Brindle

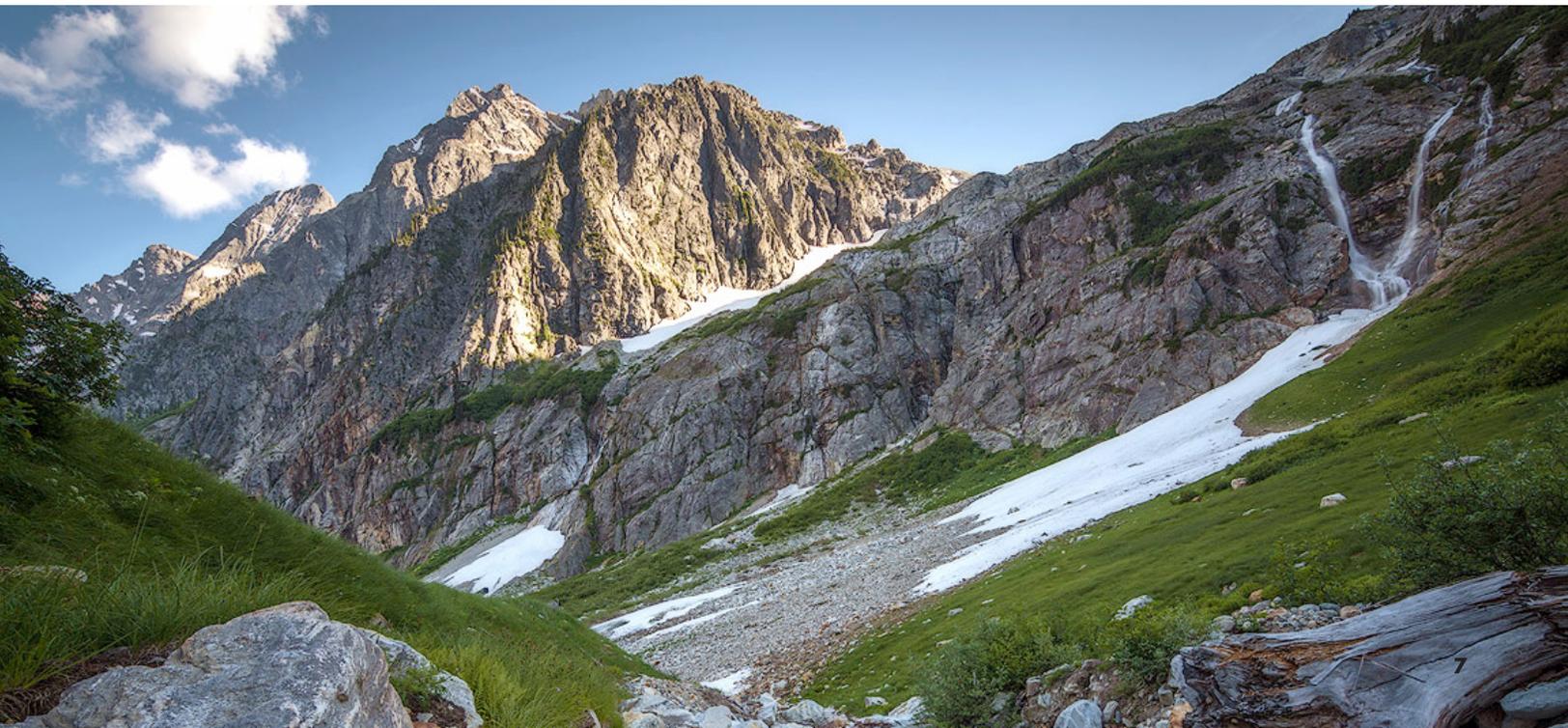
FWS and NPS Response to Comments

We will review every comment submitted and prepare responses to substantive comments. Some responses may be reflected as edits to the text of the final EIS if needed to clarify existing information or add new information. The final EIS will contain summaries of the substantive comments and responses to those comments in an appendix.

Substantive comments are defined as those that do one or more of the following:

- Question, with reasonable basis, the accuracy of information in the draft EIS
- Question, with reasonable basis, the adequacy of the analysis
- Present reasonable alternatives other than those presented in the draft EIS
- Cause changes or revisions to the restoration actions proposed in the alternatives.

When preparing your written comments, provide as much detail as possible and relate your comments back to the draft EIS. This will ensure that your comments are understood and your concerns are fully addressed in the responses.





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Anticipated Project Schedule

Winter 2015	Public Scoping	
Winter 2017	Draft EIS Release and Public Comment	WE ARE HERE
Fall 2017	Final EIS Release	
Winter 2018	NPS/FWS Record of Decision	