

Grizzly Delisting Update

By Melissa Thomasma

Every day for the past year, Wyoming Wildlife Advocates has worked to keep grizzlies of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem protected under the Endangered Species Act. From carefully following all news and management developments, to sharing action opportunities with supporters, to representing those supporters at regional meetings, WWA has been fighting for Wyoming's grizzlies.

It's not often that we get good news, but just last month, we were surprised and delighted to hear that – due to the overwhelming volume of public comments – the delisting process has been delayed for six months, until June. Through social media campaigns, articles in regional newspapers and other outreach, WWA and its supporters contributed significantly to the over 650,000 comments that the US Fish & Wildlife Service ultimately received – that's more than twice the number generated during the last delisting attempt in 2007.

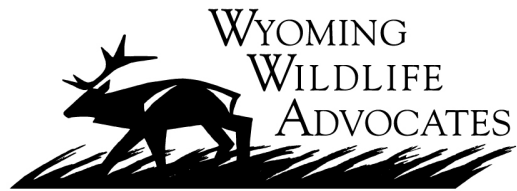
Wyoming Wildlife Advocates Newsletter

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While this postponement is great news in the short-term, the fight is far from over; scientists and conservationists are decrying the premature nature of the delisting effort, and many residents of regional communities are speaking out against the probable trophy hunting of bears.

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Grizzly bear experts believe that there simply is not scientific evidence to support delisting at this point. The full impact of some dynamic elements of the grizzlies' habitat is yet unclear. Over the past decade, key food sources have diminished. Overly aggressive fire suppression, insect infestation, climate change and fungus have all but wiped out whitebark pine, a critical source of calories for the bears.

Additionally, as invasive Lake Trout crowd out populations of Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout, there are fewer of the native fish for the bears to consume. Ultimately, like the overarching problem of climate change itself, the impacts of these ecological changes on the grizzly population are not fully understood yet. It's impossible to know how stable the population of bears really is when their most important food sources are in decline.

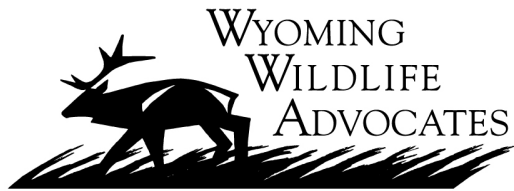
As these traditional food sources diminish, grizzlies are forced to wander farther from their core habitat to find sufficient nutrients. Some have incorrectly cited this dispersion as evidence of a population explosion. Rather, it is evidence of bears searching for food substitutes, and could mark the beginning of a long-term trend. Sadly, one consequence of this trend is already apparent: grizzly mortalities have increased every year over the past three years, while the overall population has declined. As bears wander farther from core habitat, they are more likely to encounter not only hazardous roads and other infrastructure, but also to get into conflicts with humans.



Many conservationists believe that Congress will move forward with the delisting of grizzly bears, as they are currently attempting to do with wolves in Wyoming and the Midwest. These decisions are rooted more deeply in partisan politics than science, and we at WWA believe that's fundamentally wrong. Wildlife management should be based on science and facts, not politics.

With environmental factors threatening the GYE bears to an unknown extent, adding trophy hunting to the list would not only damage the grizzly population, but also the state's economy. Surveys show that the vast majority of visitors to the area expect to have an opportunity to see a bear. These visitors bring millions of dollars to the region – the economic value of tourism in the area is indisputable. Not only is trophy hunting morally wrong and ecologically unnecessary, but a threat to the economies of communities that benefit from wildlife watchers. Simply put, a live bear is worth much more than a dead bear.

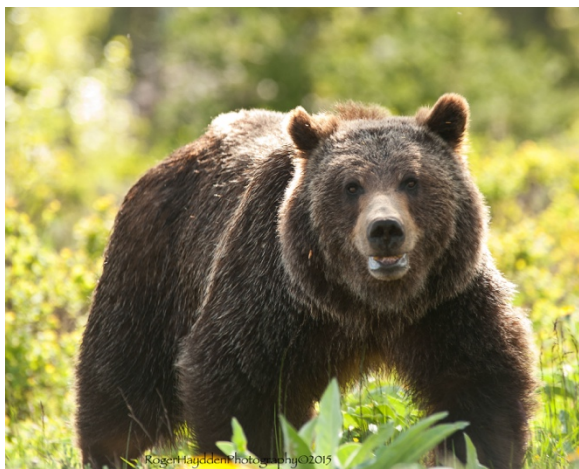
Grizzly bears are important and deserve protection for a wide diversity of reasons. From regional tribes who assign the grizzly religious value, to communities like Jackson



Hole and West Yellowstone who depend on the dollars that visitors bring when they come to see wild bears, many communities deeply value these animals.. This regional appreciation, in addition to the lack of full understanding of current habitat and population trends combine to underscore what WWA believes wholeheartedly: it's much too soon to remove grizzly bears from the Endangered Species Act.

Public comments earned the grizzlies a six-month reprieve, and only continued public outcry will protect them further. WWA will continue to fight, and we invite each of you to join us in our persistent vigilance and advocacy for this keystone species of the GYE.

Visit www.wyomingwildlifeadvocates.org to learn more about grizzlies in the GYE and read the latest news on delisting.

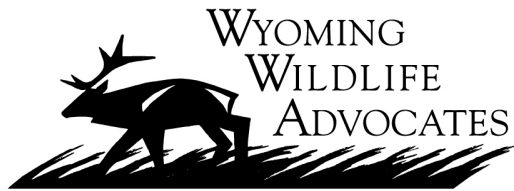


Chronic Wasting Disease: Expanding Across the Landscape

By Lloyd Dorsey

Though chronic wasting disease hasn't yet been detected in Jackson Hole's iconic elk herd, the disease is worrying conservationists and management officials alike. WWA continues to work to eliminate feedgrounds – a hotbed for disease transmission – and champion science-based management plans and practices.

For half a century, the deadly neurodegenerative chronic wasting disease (CWD) has radiated outward across the landscape from Fort Collins, Colorado - where it was first discovered in the 1960s. From this regional epicenter, the epidemic that kills deer, elk, and moose, is now affecting wild herds as far away as southern Colorado, eastern Nebraska, Utah, and northern Wyoming including the edges of the world-renowned Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Though its progress is not rapid, it is steady; in the Colorado-Wyoming area, the disease appears to push out across the



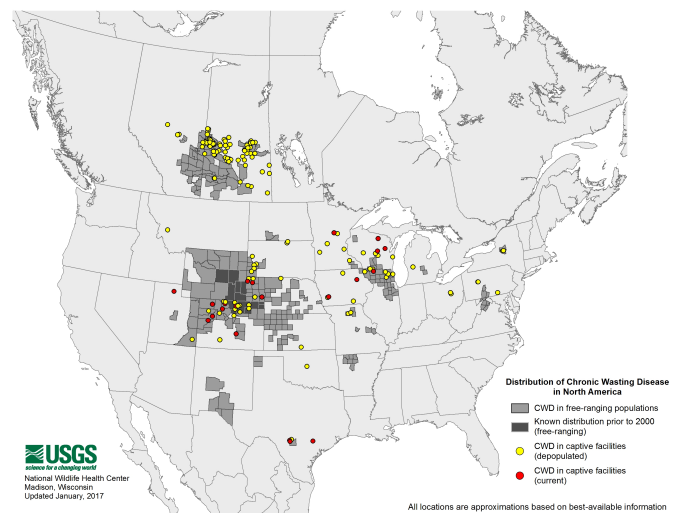
landscape from endemic areas approximately 5 to 11 miles per year.

Similar, but geographically smaller, epidemics of CWD among white-tailed and mule deer are acting in the same manner, spreading outward from southern Wisconsin, the Alberta-Saskatchewan border, and West Texas-New Mexico. (See the map Distribution of Chronic Wasting Disease in North America) All things being equal, over time, the endemic areas will likely join, and the temperate zone of the North American continent will be the largest prion disease endemic zone on earth. Once bountiful deer herds will decline, and some herds may disappear altogether due to this infectious prion disease.

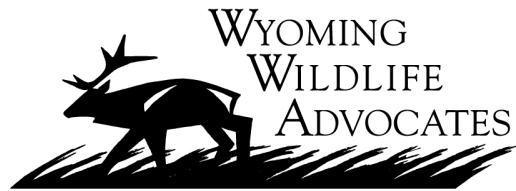
Other mammals – including humans and cattle – suffer from prion diseases that destroy the neurologic system and brain. In humans, it is typically known as Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease. In cattle it's called Bovine Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy, or Mad Cow Disease. Scientists currently believe that neither humans nor cattle can contract CWD. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, however, counsels people not to eat infected deer or elk. We all recall that people did get infected by Mad Cow Disease in the U.K. in the 1990's.

The factors that enable this disease to spread naturally in North America are two-fold: contiguous landscapes of relatively wild undeveloped lands such as national forests or parks, or open agricultural lands, and wild deer and elk herds that move naturally according to seasonal influences. In other words, successful conservation over generations has successfully protected some

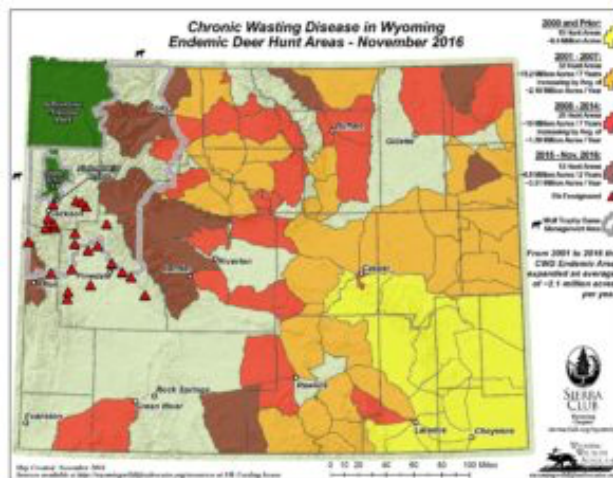
wildlands and some wildlife species. Put even another way, there are deer everywhere, in abundance far beyond what ever occurred naturally. What wasn't conserved as effectively over the past few centuries were predators – mainly wolves, cougars, and bears – that naturally limited prey herds to a healthy balance with available habitats. Herds of deer and elk overstocking the land without attending predators to cull the sick allows diseases to spread and, eventually, cause a significant decline in the herds.



What makes CWD unique is the nature of the infectious prions: they remain in the environment for many years. Where prions have built up and persist in soils and plants, deer and elk will continue to get sick and die. Deer appear to become infected faster than elk. In highly-infected areas, such as densely populated winter habitats and artificial elk or deer feedgrounds, the recovery or upswing in herd populations may not happen for years, or at all.



The map of CWD in Wyoming portrays the progression of the CWD endemic area over time and geography in one state. The endemic area of CWD expanded in Wyoming an average of 1.8 million acres per year from 2001-2014. However, from 2015-2016 the expansion of the endemic area increased to ~3.31 million acres per year, an 83 percent increase.

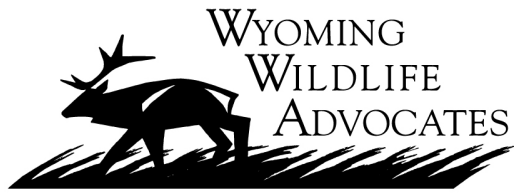


The Wyoming Game and Fish Department accounts for CWD spreading across the landscape by labeling a deer hunt area endemic once a deer has been found through post mortem analysis to be infected by CWD. From 2001-2014, the average number of new CWD-positive hunt areas per year was four per year. In 2015, five new CWD-positive deer hunt areas were designated in Wyoming. In 2016 (through November), eight new CWD-positive deer hunt areas were designated: a 100 percent increase from the 2001-2014 average. And yet another hunt area was found to be CWD positive in December 2016, making nine for the year. The disease appears to be expanding its range in Wyoming at a greater annual rate than in previous decades.

This CWD Wyoming map also shows the Gray Wolf Trophy Game Management Area in northwestern Wyoming in order to spur a discussion about the role predators may play in mitigating this disease. This area is much too small to stave off CWD in elk or deer in the Rocky Mountain area, and needs to expand anywhere there are abundant deer and elk currently without effective native predators.

Serendipitously, what may allow us more time to put in place ecocentric predator-friendly policies to better manage elk and deer populations in the future is the severe winter of 2016-17. If the magnitude of this winter persists through the season, there will likely be significant loss among mule deer and white-tailed deer herds, which are the vanguard of CWD. Allowing wolves and other predators to help keep herds at a healthier balance with habitat carrying capacities, fewer animals spread out over a larger area, and culling out the sick ones, should be a more sustainable paradigm given the reality of CWD and other diseases. What also needs to be done is to end the practice of artificially feeding deer or elk anywhere. The Sierra Club Wyoming Chapter and Wyoming Wildlife Advocates promote phasing out the high-risk elk feedgrounds in western Wyoming, allowing elk to spread out and winter on native habitats, and conserving abundant predators (wolves, bears and mountain lions) to ensure the future health of Wyoming's game herds.

To learn more about CWD and its potential impact on populations in Wyoming, visit the [Wyoming Wildlife Advocates website](http://www.wyomingwildlifeadvocates.org).



Coyote Killing Contests

In December 2016, alongside nine other environmental NGOs, WWA signed onto a letter against a series of coyote killing contests in Wyoming.

Though WWA has a variety of concerns about these kinds of hunting events, the letter cited the fact that some of these “derbies” happen on public lands and are not properly permitted or insured.

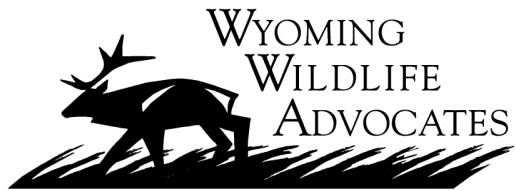
To learn more or get involved in bringing an end to these contests, we encourage you to contact [Wyoming Untrapped](#).

Thank You for Your Support

We would like to thank everyone who supported WWA in 2016 – your generosity made our work possible. Whether you donated through Old Bill’s Fun Run, on Giving Tuesday, at one of our events, or via our website, we are deeply grateful.

It was a busy year, and here are a few of the important things you helped us accomplish:

- Through summer and fall, WWA rented space on five billboards in Wyoming, Idaho and Montana with a message against delisting and trophy hunting grizzlies. We estimate that over a million visitors passed these signs on their way to Yellowstone.
- WWA hired David Mattson, a scientist retired from the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team, to help interpret and comment on the delisting rule and provide insight and advice.
- Through 2016, we continued to enjoy press coverage in publications including the JH News & Guide, Bozeman Chronicle, Christian Science Monitor, Casper Star Tribune, the HSUS publication, All Animals, and National Geographic online. We also saw our op-eds published in some of the publications above as well as High Country News’ syndicated Writers on the Range.
- We contributed to a six-month delay in delisting grizzlies; the US Fish & Wildlife Service received more than 650,000 in comments and needed additional time to process them all.
- We attended numerous meetings related to grizzly bear delisting, including one hosted by the US Fish & Wildlife Service in Bozeman on April 12, 2016. We provided



comments at that hearing, and were quoted in the Bozeman Chronicle.

- We rallied a large crowd May 24, 2016, to attend a Wyoming Game & Fish Department meeting at the Virginian Lodge on grizzly bear hunting regulations. Many attending wore t-shirts designed and distributed by WWA.
- We made updates to our CWD map in March and November 2016, which has enjoyed broad circulation.
- WWA leadership created a “Don’t Delist” petition, which collected approximately 140,000 signatures.

To read the complete list of WWA’s organizational accomplishments in 2016, please see the full document on the [Wyoming Wildlife Advocates website](#).

Again, we are thankful for your support during the past year. As we look forward into 2017 and beyond, we know there will be many challenges and opportunities. WWA remains dedicated to protecting not only the grizzlies of the GYE, but also all of Wyoming’s wildest occupants. We hope you will continue to help us do so.



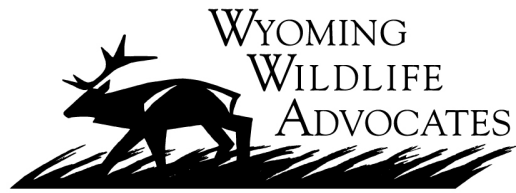
A New Era of Conservation

With the departure of President Obama and the inauguration of President Trump, it's clear that conservation groups such as Wyoming Wildlife Advocates will now be engaging on a dramatically different playing field.

In the 1960s and '70s a host of bold environmental laws were put in place. The Wilderness Act, the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act were foremost among these new laws and seemed to herald a new appreciation for the natural world which surrounds and sustains us.

They were put in place because Americans had a growing sense that the great industrial might of America had a nearly insatiable desire to consume natural resources, and if left unchecked, we would lose species and wild spaces, and much of the character of this great land.

These laws, it seemed, showed a mature society's recognition of its responsibility to preserve wilderness and wildlife as valuable legacies for future generations.



They showed a willingness to protect and steward what remained of the natural world after the Industrial Revolution and its aftermath vastly increased the scale of human consumption, and thus the extraction of natural resources, to ever higher levels.

And yet the tension between preservation of nature and exploitation of nature hasn't been this pronounced for over half a century.

As natural resources become scarcer, as growing populations desire and consume more, resources become ever more valuable, the stakes become higher, and those that seek to profit from them will go to ever greater lengths to exploit them.

This is a treacherous vicious circle.

We can all share in the bounty of nature around us or we can all acquiesce to the exploitation of natural resources that, because of their increasing scarcity, become ever more valuable to the industrial concerns that seek to exploit them.

It is clear that in the near to medium term conservation legislation is where the action will be. Already we hear that landmark legislation such as the ESA is under siege by congress. In what is arguably the wildest area of the lower 48 apex predators are viewed as impediments to profits by too many of our elected officials.

A secondary focus will have to be litigation to protect what has already been achieved. The courts are the strongest bulwarks against the changing tides we face, but that too is likely to change for the worse over time.

In its short history WWA has focused on the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem because it is the beating heart of NW Wyoming. We will continue down that path because if we can't protect the GYE, when it is universally beloved by residents and visitors, what can we protect?

The GYE is an island. It is inevitable that it will become more, not less, isolated as the population grows and the race for what scarce resources remain drives industry into ever greater efforts to feed their profits.

We've been sold down the river by politicians enslaved by corporate money, and private money derived from corporations. We, the people, must stand fast.

Organizations such as WWA, and there are many, and mass advocacy by the public are the last lines of defense for what remains of the wild. We hope you will stand with us and others to defy an agenda that values profits at the expense of all else.

Kent Nelson
Executive Director

Roger Hayden
Managing Director

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