

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing.

My legislation, the Comprehensive Grizzly Bear Management Act (H.R. 1419) directs the Secretary of the Interior to promptly remove the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem population of grizzly bears from the Endangered Species List. This legislation provides Montanans with the means to safeguard their lives, livestock, and livelihoods from the growing menace of grizzly bears that have grown dangerously comfortable around human communities.

Montana has the largest population of Grizzly Bears in the lower 48 states, including both the Northern Continental Divide and Greater Yellowstone populations. Despite the significant growth in these Grizzly populations over recent decades, they are still classified as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

In 1975, when Grizzly Bears were initially labeled a threatened species, there were believed to be only about 800 bears in the lower 48 states. Since then, Grizzly populations have exploded. Today, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports that the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem alone, located in northwestern Montana, is home to nearly 1,100 Grizzlies. The species has recovered to more than 1,900 wild bears in the United States.

While Grizzly Bear population is thriving, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service consistently revises recovery goals, thereby retaining federal management responsibilities. This trend sets a concerning precedent for other species under the ESA and diminishes the motivation for landowners and users to implement conservation practices.

Human-bear conflicts have escalated as these bear populations have expanded into previously uninhabited areas, posing a significant risk to my constituents. Just two weeks ago, a grizzly bear was tragically struck by a motorist near Bonner, Montana.¹ This incident marks the southernmost recorded case of a grizzly roadkill within the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem. As these bears venture farther south, beyond their established core zone in the NCDE, they are increasingly vulnerable to collisions with vehicles. This growing trend poses potential risks for both truckers and motorists in the state.

¹ https://missoulian.com/news/local/grizzly-killed-by-vehicle-near-bonner/article_980609d4-6f88-11ee-8f56-2ba0739f1dcb.html

Grizzly Bears are predators. There are only a small handful of members on this committee that have grizzly bears in their districts, and it is extremely unlikely the bureaucrats working for the government agencies headquartered in Washington, D.C. have encountered one either. However, these bureaucrats and certain committee members persist in offering insights regarding the consequences of retaining these Grizzlies on the list, despite lacking firsthand experience or expertise on the matter.

In 2022, there were nearly 150 confirmed or probable claims of livestock predation caused by grizzly bears in Montana alone—costing residents, farmers and ranchers hundreds of thousands of dollars. Even still, these numbers don't capture total livestock predation as it's impossible for ranchers to know if missing livestock has been eaten.

It also does not begin to capture the human cost: the hours spent trying to protect livestock, the sleepless nights, and the fear of letting your children play outside.

These predators don't just claim the lives of livestock. They are fully capable of killing or maiming people too. As these bears continue to expand outside of their recovery zones and into cities--the number of conflicts and encounters will expand with them.

This bill does not call or wish for mass hunting of Grizzly Bears. But instead, what this bill does is ensure that states—not the federal government—are able to manage grizzly bear populations as best as they deem fit. Wildlife management practices have also drastically improved and evolved since the bears were added to the Endangered Species List and Montana is widely recognized as one of the best wildlife managers in the world.

As long as the Grizzly Bear is designated a threatened species in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystems, state management of the species is hamstrung, and my constituents can't defend their property from predators.

The science does not support keeping the Grizzly Bear listed as a threatened species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service tried delisting the Grizzly Bear several times but has been overruled by activist judges influenced by their liberal agendas. This is unacceptable and must be reformed.