

For immediate release
June 5, 2019

Contacts:

Pete Frost, Western Environmental Law Center, 541-543-0018, frost@westernlaw.org
Lindsay Larris, WildEarth Guardians, 310-923-1465, llarris@wildearthguardians.org
Dana Johnson, Wilderness Watch, 208-310-7003, danajohnson@wildernesswatch.org
Greta Anderson, Western Watersheds Project, 520-623-1878, greta@westernwatersheds.org

Grizzly Deaths Spur Bear Baiting Challenge in Idaho, Wyoming

BOISE—Today, wildlife advocates [challenged](#) in federal court a U.S. Forest Service policy granting states authority to allow black bear baiting in national forests, despite knowing that such practices have resulted in the deaths of threatened grizzly bears. Hunters have killed threatened grizzlies attracted to bait stations, typically stocked with human food intended to lure black bears. Currently, only Idaho and Wyoming allow bear baiting in national forests. The challenge comes as Congress considers a [bill](#) to enact expanded protections for threatened grizzlies.

“Bear baiting not only violates ‘fair chase’ hunting ethics, it has caused deaths of iconic grizzlies,” said Lindsay Larris of WildEarth Guardians. “Federal agencies are bound by the law to recover threatened grizzlies, and knowingly allowing bear baiting flagrantly violates that duty.”

Until 1992, the Forest Service required hunters and guides to obtain a special use permit to use bait to hunt black bears in national forests. Documents defining the terms of the policy change prohibits any grizzly killing (“take”) due to bear baiting. Should any grizzly bear deaths occur, “the [Forest Service] must reinitiate consultation with the [Fish and Wildlife] Service and provide the circumstances surrounding the take.” The decision’s biological opinion also stated there was only a “remote possibility that a grizzly bear may be taken as a result of black bear baiting.”

After the Forest Service allowed states alone to decide whether bait could be used, the grizzly bear population in the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem increased. Since 1995, at least eight grizzly bears have been shot and killed at black bear bait stations in national forests in Idaho and Wyoming, and more have been killed at bait stations on other public and private lands.

Vague agency record keeping prohibits certainty about the extent of grizzly mortalities at black bear bait stations. However, in 2007, a grizzly was killed in the Bitterroot ecosystem on Forest Service land, the first grizzly known to inhabit the area in over half a century.

"Grizzlies are making their way to the vast, wild country of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, and they'll get there if we let them," said Dana Johnson of Wilderness Watch. "Unfortunately, the many bait stations scattered along that path are death-magnets for dispersing bears. It's past time for the Forest Service to do something about it."

Also since giving states the power to allow bear baiting in national forests, scientists have established a significant body of research showing baiting causes harmful and irreversible grizzly bear conditioning to human food and disrupts grizzlies’ behavioral dynamics.

“The confirmed grizzly killings at bait stations are more than enough to trigger the Forest Service to reevaluate its policy delegating these decisions to states,” said Pete Frost, attorney with the Western Environmental Law Center. “Safe passage for grizzlies to the Selway Bitterroot ecosystem is critical to their recovery, and the Forest Service is required to reassess whether to allow states to control bear baiting in our national forests.”

Given bear baiting’s harmful effects on threatened grizzly bears, the groups involved in the case want the Forest Service to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service to re-evaluate whether bear baiting decisions should be up to states, and whether baiting is too harmful to threatened grizzly bears.

###