

# Only US grizzly recovery coordinator retiring after 35 years

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The nation's first and only grizzly bear recovery coordinator is stepping down after 35 years, saying the threatened species has recovered enough for him to retire.

Chris Servheen of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is retiring at the end of April. Wayne Kasworm will become acting recovery coordinator.

Servheen, 65, said he considers bear populations in Yellowstone National Park and the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem to be recovered.

But when he began his work in 1981—right after getting his doctorate at the University of Montana—the challenges seemed insurmountable.

"I didn't think at all that we would get to recovery," Servheen told the Bozeman Daily Chronicle. "In fact, I really wondered if we would even have [grizzly bears](#) around."

At the time, garbage dumps, livestock herds and backcountry hunting camps were creating conflicts and bear numbers were low.

He brought together state, federal and local governments as well as conservation groups to recover grizzly bear populations in six areas throughout the Northwest: the Cabinet-Yaak area in northwest Montana; the Selkirk area in parts of Idaho, Washington and British Columbia; the Bitterroot in western Montana; the Northern Continental Divide, including Glacier National Park and nearby wilderness areas at the

Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

"It was a great challenge and a great honor," Servheen said.

Early on, one of the biggest challenges was getting people living in and visiting grizzly habitat to change their behaviors—from how they disposed of their trash to cleaning up backcountry camps.

"All the things that people do, they're all different now because everything has grizzly bears in the background," Servheen said.

Now, the USFWS is proposing removing Endangered Species Act protections for around 700 bears in the Yellowstone area. Servheen wrote the proposed rule.

Some think it's too soon, while others think it should have been done long ago.

As Servheen winds down his career, he's hearing from people he's worked with, and sometimes against, in trying to improve grizzly bear habitat and their populations.

In West Yellowstone last week, members of the Yellowstone Ecosystem Subcommittee of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee thanked him for his years of service, as did Scott Christensen, the executive director of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition.

"We have at times been at odds and at opposite sides of the courtroom," Christensen said. "But we respect your contribution to grizzly bear conservation."

There are up to 1,700 grizzly bears in the West, with most in Montana and Wyoming—about three times as many as when Servheen began his

work.

Servheen told the Great Falls Tribune he plans to spend more time in the backcountry with his children with a chance to see a grizzly bear, rather than sit in meetings talking about them. He'll also continue as an adjunct professor at the University of Montana, where he has taught a course in international wildlife management for the past 18 years.

"Summer's coming. The backcountry is opening up and it's calling to me, and that's where I want to be."

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