

Wyoming to vote on biggest grizzly hunt in lower 48 states

May 23 2018, by Mead Gruver



In this July 6, 2011, file photo, a grizzly bear roams near Beaver Lake in Yellowstone National Park, Wyo. Wyoming will decide Wednesday, May 23, 2018, whether to allow grizzly bear hunting for the first time in decades. Under the proposed rules before the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission, hunting would begin Sept. 1 in the mountains and basins farthest from Yellowstone and Grand Teton. Hunting closer to the parks would begin Sept. 15 and end in all areas by Nov. 15. (AP Photo/Jim Urquhart, File)

Wyoming could allow grizzly bear hunting for the first time in decades when state officials vote Wednesday whether to allow as many as 22 grizzlies to be killed this fall outside Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks.

Environmental groups including the Sierra Club and Native American tribes say the hunt would undermine decades of work to restore [grizzlies](#) in the Yellowstone ecosystem. About 700 grizzlies now inhabit the region including parts of Idaho and Montana, up from 136 in 1975 when they were listed as a threatened species.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed federal protections for grizzlies in the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem in 2017 and Wyoming officials say relatively few would be hunted.

"This came after a lot of discussions with the public about what they wanted to do in terms of grizzly bear management. We heard from the people of Wyoming, they were supportive of this. It's pretty clear the science supports this," said Wyoming Game and Fish Department spokesman Renny MacKay.

The last time grizzly hunting was allowed in Wyoming was 1974.

Montana has not yet allowed grizzly hunting. Idaho will allow one grizzly to be hunted this fall. Hunting has been ongoing in Alaska where grizzlies and their minimally differentiated brown bear and Kodiak bear relatives are common.

Under the proposed rules before the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission, hunting would begin Sept. 1 in the mountains and basins populated by relatively few grizzlies farthest from Yellowstone and Grand Teton. Hunting in a zone closer to the parks would begin Sept. 15 and end in all areas by Nov. 15.

As many as 12 grizzlies could be killed in the zone farther from the parks. Closer in, the limit is 10 and hunting would be stopped once 10 males or one female are killed, whichever happens first.

No more than one grizzly hunter at a time would be allowed in the closer-in zone to help ensure nobody accidentally exceeded the quota.

If the hunt goes forward and demand for licenses is high, hunters might wait years for their chance. A computer program would randomly draw names of license applicants who would then pay \$600 for a resident grizzly license and \$6,000 if they live elsewhere.

Names would be drawn until 10 hunters have paid for their licenses and certified they've taken a firearms safety course. Each [license](#) would be valid for a 10-day window of opportunity.

If approved, [hunting](#) could account for a sizeable portion of grizzly deaths in the region this year but not likely the biggest. Of the 56 known and suspected deaths of Yellowstone grizzlies in 2017, 40 were caused by people including 19 killed by elk hunters and others in self-defense.

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