

More grizzlies in Idaho? Federal proposal could make it happen as Republicans push delisting

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials have moved forward with plans to consider restoring grizzly bear populations to a part of Idaho where

they haven't been seen regularly in decades, all while Idaho's governor and congressional delegation continue to try to remove endangered species protections for the bears.

The federal project weighs options for bears in the Bitterroot ecosystem, a swath of land stretching from Central Idaho to western Montana. It's one of six grizzly recovery zones that were identified in the 1990s as part of the species survival plan for the endangered bear population in the contiguous United States.

While the occasional grizzly has been documented by radio collar or trail camera wandering through portions of the recovery zone in recent years, the Lewiston Tribune reported that tracks and in-person sightings were last documented in the 1930s and '40s. Currently grizzlies are in eastern and northern Idaho, in the Greater Yellowstone and Cabinet-Yaak recovery zones.

Last year, a Montana [federal judge](#) ordered a review of the Bitterroot after concluding Fish and Wildlife Service officials did not adequately assist bear [recovery](#) there. The agency had planned to introduce 25 grizzlies in the early 2000s but later scrapped the plans. At the time, Idaho officials filed a lawsuit against the agency over the reintroduction plans.

Idaho Republican elected officials, including Gov. Brad Little and the state's congressional delegates, have been outspoken opponents of grizzlies' Endangered Species Act protections in the last several years, threatening [legal action](#) and introducing bills to force their delisting.

Sens. Jim Risch and Mike Crapo and Rep. Russ Fulcher, all co-sponsors of last year's delisting bill, did not respond to requests for comment. Gov. Little's office also didn't respond.

Fish and Wildlife Service hosted an information session on the project earlier this week, and two more are scheduled for next week. A public comment period on the proposal ends March 18.

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