

**RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS
SKAGIT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2017**

The Skagit County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Wednesday, February 22, 2017, with Chair Ron Wesen, Commissioner Kenneth A. Dahlstedt, and Commissioner Lisa Janicki present.

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Wesen called the proceedings to order at 9:00 a.m.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Chair Wesen led the gallery in the salute to the flag.

III. AGENDA:

a) *7:30 a.m. Breakfast with Elected Officials (Calico Cupboard, 121B Freeway Drive, Mount Vernon)

b) 9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m. Informational Presentation by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - North Cascades Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Restoration Public Comment Process

Chair Wesen invited staff from the North Cascades National Park Service to provide a presentation. Karen Taylor-Goodrich, Superintendent, North Cascades National Park Service Complex introduced Eric Rickerson, State Supervisor, Washington Fish and Wildlife Office, US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Mr. Rickerson thanked the Commissioners for inviting them to provide information on the grizzly bear restoration plan. He said that other Park and Wildlife staff were also in the audience to listen and answer additional questions.

Jack Oelfke, Chief of Natural and Cultural Resources, North Cascades National Park Service Complex provided a summary of the grizzly bear restoration plan that started in 1997. He addressed bear recovery in Montana and Idaho and he said that the current plan for grizzly bear restoration in the North Cascades ecosystem was ready for public comments following which, it would be finalized and implemented. Mr. Oelfke said that the goal was to reach a population of 200 bears and that the plan outlined 4 alternatives to bear recovery in the North Cascades:

Alternative A: No action. Discontinue the plan they had been working on for 20 years. Focus instead on habitat management and see if bears migrate into the region on their own.

Alternative B: Approach recovery slowly. Import 10 bears in the first two years and evaluate. After the 4th year, meet to decide how to move forward in reaching their goal of 200 bears (which would take up to 100 years).

Alternative C: Import 25 bears. Monitor. It may take 60 - 100 years to reach a population of 200 bears.

Alternative D: Import 5 – 7 bears a year for as long as it took to reach 200 bears through natural means and import. This would take approximately 25 years.

Mr. Oelfke informed the Commissioners that since this plan was an experiment, they had greater flexibility within it for managing any bears that came into conflict with farmers, miners, and those in forestry. He said a management plan would be worked on once the grizzly restoration plan was completed. He said that the source bear population would be coming from British Columbia and Montana where there were healthy bear populations that fed on food sources that the North Cascades also had: berries, grubs and small mammals. He said that not a lot of bears fed on fish.

Mr. Oelfke discussed the environmental consequences of whether or not bears were reintroduced to the North Cascades. He said the bears would see benefits, black bears would be impacted minimally, the recreational experience would be impacted positively, there was low potential for bear/human conflict, low potential for impacts to agriculture, livestock, and mining, and, positive impacts for tribes.

Mr. Oelfke said that comments regarding the grizzly bear restoration plan, and which of the 4 alternatives were preferred, were being accepted through March 14, 2017, and that additional public meetings were being held in neighboring counties. He said the plan could be found at www.parkplanning.nps.gov/grizzlydeis

The information provided by Mr. Oelfke can be found here:
<ftp://ftp.skagitcounty.net/countycommissioners/documents/agendapackets/02202017/>

Chair Wesen thanked Mr. Oelfke for the presentation and announced that the Commissioners were holding the meeting to hear about the grizzly bear restoration plan, comment process, and to hear what residents thought about the plan. Chair Wesen said that Skagit County would be preparing a comment letter by March 14, 2017, and he suggested interested parties also provide comments directly to the Parks Service.

Carol Ehlers of Fidalgo Island, Gary Hagland of Anacortes, Brian Lipscomb of Sedro-Woolley, Randy and Aileen Good of Sedro-Woolley, Roger Mitchell of Bow, DeAnna Claus of Anacortes, Andrea Xaver of Mount Vernon, and Ellen Bynum of Mount Vernon provided comments against restoring grizzly bears to the North Cascades. Some of the points made included concerns about conflicts between bears and humans and also bears and livestock, adequate compensation for livestock killed by bears, having an inadequate food source, concerns that support for bears in the North Cascades was strongest among people who lived in another county, the lack of confidence that they would be managed effectively (due to the mismanagement residents were experiencing by the introduction of elk in Skagit County and wolves in Idaho), that RCW 77.12.035 prohibited importing bears from out-of-state, and that the plan lacked adequate risk analysis and data.

Chris Morgan of Bellingham, Rusty Kuntze of Mount Vernon, Ed Gastellum of Anacortes, Timothy Manns of Mount Vernon, Ginny Darvill of Mount Vernon, Libby Mills of Bay View, Richard Koweu of Mount Vernon, and Graham Taylor of Seattle provided comments supporting the restoration of grizzly bears to the North Cascades. Some of the points made included that bears would provide a unique recreational opportunity, that having an intact ecosystem was important, that being able to remove grizzly bears from the endangered species list would be beneficial, that more education needed to be provided about bears, that restoring a native species was the right thing to do, and that parks were a place for wildlife to thrive.

Chair Wesen excused himself at 9:59 a.m. in order to travel to Seattle for another engagement.

Commissioner Janicki thanked the Parks Service for their presentation and the audience for their comments.

IV. ADJOURNMENT:

Commissioner Janicki adjourned the proceedings at 10:09 a.m.

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SKAGIT COUNTY, WASHINGTON**

Ron Wesen, Chair

Kenneth A. Dahlstedt, Commissioner

Lisa Janicki, Commissioner

ATTEST:

Clerk of the Board