



CROW CREEK SIOUX TRIBE

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To Whom it May Concern:

The sovereignty and spiritual rights of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe and the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota people of the Great Sioux Nation are threatened by the proposed delisting of the Yellowstone grizzly bear from Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The Crow Creek Sioux Tribe is one of the twenty-six Tribal Nations the federal government recognizes as having an ancestral connection to Yellowstone ("Associated Tribe of Yellowstone" – *Resources & Issues*, NPS, 2010). In total, ten of those Tribal Nations are from the Oceti Sakowin (Great Sioux Nation), but to date none have been consulted in this process.

Chief Arvol Looking Horse, 19th Generation Keeper of the White Buffalo Calf Pipe of the Great Sioux Nation, detailed the spiritual and ceremonial significance of the grizzly bear in Lakota, Dakota and Nakota culture in his November 2014 statement in opposition to delisting of the Yellowstone grizzly from the ESA.

The cultural, geographic and sacred landscape of the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota people demonstrates the cultural importance of the grizzly bear. Sacred sites like Mato Tipila (Devils Tower) and Mato Paha (Bear Butte) are inseparable from our ceremonial connection to the grizzly. Numerous traditional and current family names, along with the names of creeks, rivers and buttes, were inspired by the grizzly bear. Many of our great historical leaders carried grizzly bear names, Smutty Bear, Medicine Bear, White Bear, and Two Bears among them.

As Chief Looking Horse has demonstrated, the ceremonial significance of the grizzly in our spiritual lifeway is an ancient

connection. Like all of our spiritual and religious ways, ceremonies related to the grizzly are protected by the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (PL 95-341-1978/PL 103-344 -1994). The Act states that laws and policies pertaining to "conservation and preservation of natural species" cannot be "passed without consideration of their effect on traditional American Indian religions." So far, in its attempts to delist the Yellowstone grizzly bear without regard to the religious practices of tribal people, the FWS is doing precisely that.

Abrogation of the AIRFA threatens potentially detrimental consequences not only for our religious and spiritual rights, but the sovereignty of all of the affected Tribal Nations.

Executive Order 13175 (Nov. 6, 2000) "Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments" signed by President Clinton, and the Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies (Nov. 5, 2009) issued by President Obama, requiring a "complete and consistent implementation of Executive Order 13175," have yet to be followed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) during this process.

Executive Order 13647 (June 2013) states, "Greater engagement and meaningful consultation with tribes is of paramount importance in developing any policies affecting tribal nations." The proposed delisting of the Yellowstone grizzly bear affects the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota people of the Oceti Sakowin (Great Sioux Nation).

The Secretarial Order issued by the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Commerce pursuant to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531), established the protocols to be followed when decisions related to the ESA had the potential to impact tribes. The Order directs the FWS to "solicit traditional knowledge, and comments from, and utilize the expertise of, affected Indian tribes" during the consultation

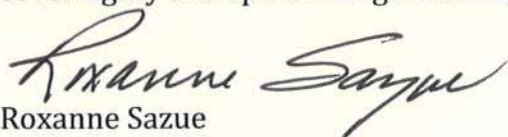
process, and “cooperate with affected tribes to develop and implement Recovery Plans in a manner that minimizes” social and cultural impacts on tribal people. In the move to delist the grizzly, this has not been followed.

Ignoring these Acts and Orders contradicts the basis of the the government-to-government relationship that exists between not only the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota Tribal Nations and the federal government, but all of the 26 Tribal Nations affected by this issue.

The Crow Creek Sioux Tribe rejects the designation of the grizzly bear as a “trophy game animal” to be killed by big game hunters on the lands our ancestors defended. As one of those defenders, the respected Lakota Bear Medicine Man, Sword, said, “The grizzly bear is *wakan*.”

The Acts and Orders cited herein entitle the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe (and the other 25 affected Tribal Nations) to review the raw data the FWS is basing all of its conclusions upon relative to delisting the grizzly bear. Several tribes have already called upon the FWS to release that data not only to the affected Tribal Nations, but also to independent scientists for analysis and review, which must happen.

The Crow Creek Sioux Tribe supports Chief Arvol Looking Horse’s position in opposing the removal of the Yellowstone grizzly bear from the Endangered Species Act, and the work of GOAL Tribal Coalition. We join the other affected Tribal Nations that have issued resolutions, declarations and statements in opposition to delisting the grizzly and call for the FWS to begin the process of consultation to ensure that our sovereignty and spiritual rights are upheld.



Roxanne Sazue
CCST Chairwoman