

# Osage Nation

Office of the Principal Chief

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Dear Secretary Jewell,

The Osage Nation supports the hundred-plus Tribal Nations on both sides of the border that have so far signed the intertribal treaty, issued resolutions, declarations, and official letters expressing opposition to the delisting of the sacred Yellowstone grizzly bear from Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections.

The spiritual rights of traditional Osage people are threatened by this direct attack on the sovereignty and spiritual rights of the Tribal Nations designated as “Associated Tribes of Yellowstone” by the federal government.

By attempting to remove the Yellowstone grizzly bear from ESA protections without regard to the ceremonial and religious practices of tribal people, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is doing so, “without consideration of their effect on traditional American Indian religions,” which is a violation of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (PL 95-341–1978/PL 103-344 –1994).

Every federal agency is required to consult with Tribal Nations before they recommend a course of action that has the potential to affect tribal rights and interests. This must occur in this process, as the sovereignty of the affected Tribal Nations cannot be undermined. The affected tribes have not been consulted, and, in fact, have been omitted, from the critical post-delisting regulatory mechanism, the Conservation Strategy. This matter urgently needs resolving. The sovereignty of the Osage Nation, in common with the other affected Tribal Nations, is inherent.

Historically, the Osage people shared a deep cultural relationship with the grizzly, before the vast tide of Westward immigrants extirpated them from the Great Plains. In many of our names can be found the story of the grizzly bear. The Osage demonstrated the greatest respect toward the grizzly, and like the Pawnee practiced the first acts of conservation toward the Great Bear.

Recognizing that the immigrants were decimating the grizzly population, the Osage carved elk antler to make replica grizzly claws, and used those for grizzly claw necklaces instead of actual grizzly claws. This was no small initiative, as the power, strength, and

courage symbolized by the grizzly, was represented by the claw necklaces worn by only the bravest and most esteemed Osage veterans.

Today, the two small island populations of grizzly bears in the lower-48 survive on less than 2% of their original range, with only 2% of their historic population. In view of that, the grizzly bear cannot be considered a recovered species appropriate for removal from ESA protections. We oppose the desire of the states to open trophy hunts on the Yellowstone grizzly; our ancestors saw the effects of this on the Great Plains grizzly, and we do not wish to see history repeat with the Yellowstone grizzly.

Several Tribal Nations have proposed alternative solutions to outdated “wildlife management” practices that revolve around killing. Our people, like those from the other impacted Tribal Nations, come from a subsistence tradition, not a killing tradition. Our ancestors taught ceremony, responsibility, and reciprocity in our lifeway.

The Osage Nation stands in solidarity with the other impacted Tribal Nations in calling for a moratorium to be instituted, so that a thorough and meaningful tribal consultation process can be initiated by FWS, and so tribes can be true partners in this process and have their alternative plans fully examined and considered before any delisting rule is finalized.

Very truly yours,



Geoffrey M. Standing Bear  
Principal Chief of the Osage Nation