



# SOUTHERN UTE INDIAN TRIBE

September 28, 2015

Director Daniel Ashe  
US Fish and Wildlife Service  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Director Ashe:

The Southern Ute Indian Tribe supports the thirty-nine Tribal Nations that have declared their opposition to the federal government's stated intent of delisting the grizzly bear from the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The Department of the Interior's delisting rule that benefits three states (Wyoming, Idaho and Montana) over a coalition of Tribal Nations from Montana to Arizona undermines the United States' trust responsibility to the Indian Tribes by elevating state interests over tribal interests. Our Tribe supports those tribal nations that have called for a moratorium to be instituted to enable tribes to have meaningful input into this decision.

In accord with the other Tribal Nations, the grizzly bear was and remains an important part of Ute culture. One of the foundational Ute ceremonials, the Bear Dance, was gifted to our people by the grizzly bear. The Ute people and the grizzly have shared a sacred relationship since time immemorial, as can be seen at sacred sites throughout our country, such as the Shavano Valley, where petroglyphs speak to the antiquity and nature of our connection to the bear.

The coalition of Tribal Nations aligned in opposition to delisting the grizzly have cataloged the Executive Orders, Secretarial Orders, and Acts that require the federal government to engage in what President Obama has described as "thorough" and "meaningful" consultation with Tribal Nations before any policy is initiated that impacts affected tribes. This trust responsibility has yet to be honored by the Department of the Interior in this process. In his recent comments to Alaska Native leaders (9/1/15), President Obama again stated his desire to, "improve communication, consultation, collaboration and participation" with tribes. This issue, and the government-to-government relationship between Tribal Nations and the federal government, requires that commitment to be met.

President Obama also referenced the “need for us to work more intensively and more collaboratively” with tribal communities, and offered Alaska Natives “direct input into the management of Chinook salmon stocks.” This is precisely what the coalition of Tribal Nations opposed to the delisting are asking for in regards to the grizzly bear. Tribes have innovative management strategies that are reflective of cultural foundations and provide alternatives to trophy hunting.

We support the right of those Tribal Nations that wish to return the grizzly bear to their sovereign lands where biologically suitable habitat exists and believe that those Tribes should be consulted before the United States takes action affecting their ability to do so.

The Utes cohabited with grizzly bears in large parts of our traditional country. The grizzly had been present in areas like the Uinta Mountains and San Juan Mountains since the Pleistocene epoch, but after our ancestors were removed from our homelands grizzlies in Utah were gone by 1923, and, it was thought, by 1952 in the San Juans in Colorado. That in 1979 a hunter in the San Juans killed a female grizzly demonstrates that traditional Ute country could still be grizzly country. We respect Tribes’ unique nation-to-nation relationships with the United States and believe that the United States should honor its commitment to meaningful consultation with Tribes affected by its actions. We therefore support those tribal nations that have called for a moratorium to be instituted to enable interested tribes to have meaningful input into this decision.

Sincerely,



Clement J. Frost, Chairman  
Southern Ute Indian Tribal Council

cc. Hon. Sally Jewell,  
Interior Secretary.