



## *Tonto Apache Tribe*

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Tonto Apache Reservation #30  
Payson, Arizona 85541  
Telephone: (928) 474-5000  
Fax: (928) 474-9125

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

Aug. 26, 2016

Dear Director Ashe,

The Tonto Apache Tribe, the Dilzhé'é, join our Apache relatives in supporting the fifty-plus Tribal Nations that have declared their opposition to the federal government's imminent delisting of the grizzly bear from the Endangered Species Act (ESA). As articulated in the official declarations and resolutions of the respective tribes, this proposal is contrary to tribal interests and will cause irreversible damage to tribal cultural practices and tribal economic initiatives.

It is very troubling to see the influence of corporate energy companies on this delisting decision. Engaging a multinational oil and gas services company, Amec Foster Wheeler, to be responsible for the peer review process of the grizzly delisting rule raises serious questions. A former Halliburton executive now runs this company, and much of the information relative to corporate energy company connections to this issue has only been revealed through the filing of Freedom of Information Act requests. Many in Indian Country see the parallels between Oak Flat, the Dakota Access Pipeline, and grizzly delisting.

It is an infringement of tribal sovereignty and a violation of the federal trust responsibility for the Department of Interior to disregard tribal interests and impose a delisting rule that benefits the economic interests of three states (Wyoming, Idaho and Montana) over a coalition of Tribal Nations from Montana to Arizona. This policy has clear implications for tribal religious and spiritual rights, potential threats to tribal sovereignty, negative economic impacts, and undermines tribal self-determination.



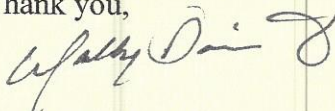
This is an issue that threatens far-ranging negative consequences for tribal people. As stated by the other tribes in their respective resolutions and declarations, enabling states to open and profit from trophy hunts of the grizzly is a clear contravention of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, as the impact that will have on the spiritual practices of tribal people cannot be overstated.

The grizzly bear is not a trophy for the affluent to kill for "sport." The grizzly bear is sacred to many Native people. Our people, the Dilzhé'é, have had a connection to the grizzly bear for time immemorial. Our ancestors discovered food gathering and medicine practices from observing the grizzly bear, and knew the grizzly in ways we do not today. The heart of our traditional country, the Mogollon Rim, held one of the largest concentrations of grizzly bears in what became Arizona. Such was our ancestors' respect for the grizzly that they would not say the bear's name, but instead referred to the grizzly by kinship terms, most frequently "grandmother" or "grandfather." Our people would not even step where a grizzly had walked.

The Dilzhé'é did not hunt grizzly bears. We played no part in the extirpation of the grizzly bear from our territory. We should, however, have a voice in the grizzly bear's future, but as yet we have been ignored. There have been no meetings proposed with tribes outside of Montana and South Dakota, and those two did not constitute government-to-government consultation. All of the Tribal Nations that oppose the delisting of the grizzly bear have called for the mandated consultation process to be initiated and undertaken in a thorough and transparent fashion that is conducted in good faith.

Grizzly bears survive on less than 2% of their original range. With maybe fewer than 2,000 bears, it is inconceivable to remove ESA protections from the grizzly when 100,000 thrived within its historic domain pre-European contact, many of them in the Southwest, in Apache country. It is estimated that some 110,000 square miles of biologically suitable grizzly habitat exists in our traditional homelands, much of which our ancestors knew intimately. Tribal Nations must be permitted the opportunity to become active participants in the future of the Great Bear. The preservation of tribal sovereignty, self-determination, and spiritual and religious rights require it to be so.

Thank you,



Wally Davis, Jr.  
NAGPRA  
Tonto Apache Tribe

cc. Hon. Sally Jewell,  
Interior Secretary.