

For Immediate Release

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes to be joined by Nat Geo Wild's Casey Anderson at Grizzly Treaty Signing Ceremony

“We’ve been against this for a longtime,” says Confederated Salish and Kootenai (CSKT) Chairman Vernon Finley of the delisting from the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of the grizzly bear in Greater Yellowstone. In the CSKT council chambers on Tuesday October 18 at 1.30pm the tribes of the Flathead Indian Reservation will reaffirm their opposition to delisting by becoming the latest signatories of what is widely becoming known as “the grizzly treaty.” Initiated by the Piikani Nation of the Blackfoot Confederacy, “The Grizzly: A Treaty of Cooperation, Cultural Revitalization and Restoration” is only the third cross-border First Nations/Native American treaty executed in over 150 years. The treaty rejects post-delisting trophy hunting of the grizzly, a sacred being fundamental to myriad tribal cultures across North America, and promotes sweeping reforms in standard federal, state and provincial grizzly “management practices,” with an emphasis grounded in traditional stewardship that melds cultural knowledge with scientific innovation. Assembly of First Nations National Chief Perry Bellegarde was the first signatory of the treaty, and in three subsequent treaty signings ten tribal nations and several traditional societies have followed.

“The grizzly bear is a species of great spiritual, cultural and ecological significance to the Confederated Salish, Kootenai and Pend d’Oreille Tribes. Grizzly bears have been revered by our people since time immemorial, and they continue to be so honored today, both here on the Flathead Indian Reservation and elsewhere throughout their geographical range and aboriginal territory,” explains Chairman Finley. “We adamantly oppose the proposal to delist the grizzly bear in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem due to our strong opposition to the inclusion of plans for sport hunting the population,” he clarifies. The Confederated Salish, Kootenai and Pend d’Oreille and the tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy retain much of the land in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem, the area the government next seeks to pursue delisting the grizzly bear.

The majority of tribes in Montana have already signed the treaty, and it is anticipated that the Northern Cheyenne and Crow will do so in the near future. Elected and traditional leaders of the Eastern Shoshone, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, and Northern Arapaho – the three tribes with seats on Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee-Yellowstone Ecosystem Subcommittee (IGBC-YES), have all signed the treaty.



All three tribes have previously issued or been party to resolutions opposing the delisting of the grizzly bear, but the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has continued to misrepresent the tribes' position on delisting, and continued to do so the day after each signed the treaty. In response, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes newspaper, the *Sho-Ban News*, published an article that flatly stated: "The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes has consistently opposed the delisting."

When it became clear that USFWS was moving ahead with delisting the grizzly, the Montana-based Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council distributed a statement by the Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association that categorized the current delisting process as "a clear and present danger to tribal sovereignty, tribal spiritual and religious freedoms, and self-determination." Tribal nations and USFWS remain at odds over what Piikani Nation Chief, Stan Grier, classifies as, "sovereignty, treaty, consultation, and spiritual and religious freedom violations." Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Vice Chairman, Darrel Shay, states that what little consultation there has been with a handful of tribes "has not been meaningful" and categorized it as "hostile." By federal mandate and executive order, consultation conducted with tribes by federal agencies must be "meaningful" and "pre-decisional."

"We are making remarkable strides with the grizzly treaty," says Chief Grier, "and I am honored to stand beside the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes in this movement, for that is what this has become – a movement." Chief Grier credits the CSKT as one of the inspirations for the treaty. "When we drafted the treaty we looked toward the CSKT. Innovations such as the People's Way wildlife crossings, seasonal closures to protect grizzlies in sensitive habitat at critical points in the bear's cycle, and the adherence to culture in contemporary practices were very influential." At the heart of the treaty is the tribal alternative to delisting and trophy hunting the grizzly: the reintroduction of grizzlies to sovereign tribal nations with biologically suitable habitat in the Great Bear's historic range for "cultural, spiritual, environmental and economic revitalization." In May, while campaigning for Secretary Hillary Clinton, President Bill Clinton offered his support for the tribes' proposal. Joining leaders of the CSKT at the treaty signing will be National Geographic's Casey Anderson, star of Nat Geo Wild. "One of the things this treaty represents is unity. Bringing people together of like heart and spirit, and Casey represents that. Casey is a great ambassador not just for the grizzly, but for all of our two-legged, four-legged and winged relatives, and our Mother, the Earth. As we strive to do in our sphere, Casey gives voice to the silent in his area of expertise and people listen," explains Chief Grier.



Grier describes grizzly delisting as the “dream scenario” for the Koch Bros. “and those who share their philosophy of backing the hostile takeover over of both Native and federal, public lands by the likes of the Bundys.” The Piikani Chief points to “ex-lobbyists for special interests” in the USFWS, such as former Acting Director, Matt Hogan, who was chief lobbyist for trophy hunting giant Safari Club International before former President George W. Bush appointed him to lead the Service. Hogan, who is now leading the delisting effort, has so far refused to comment on his work for Safari Club or his connection to Anadarko Petroleum and Gas, the largest leaseholder and landholder in Wyoming. “Let’s not fall for the spin that grizzly delisting is based upon ‘science.’ It’s not scientists in the state governments of Wyoming and Idaho that are pushing this, it’s cheerleaders for the Koch Bros. and Trump’s platform of returning federal, public lands to state control,” says Chief Grier. “We are in possession of a communication from USFWS Director Dan Ashe in which even he questions that this delisting decision is being based upon ‘the best available science standard of ESA.’” The email is from Ashe to his assistant, Gary Frazer, and is posted on the Piikani Nation Treaty website (www.piikanationtreaty.com).

Many tribal leaders have compared grizzly delisting and its consequences to the ongoing Dakota Access Pipeline struggle. “The removal of protections from the grizzly will result in the protections on the sacred lands the grizzly presently occupies being relaxed, and in some instances, removed, leaving many sacred sites and the lands that hold them vulnerable to corporate exploitation,” warns Chief Grier. Standing Rock Sioux Chairman, Dave Archambault, II was one of the first tribal leaders to formally oppose grizzly delisting. “I appeal to President Obama to hear us, not simply to talk about listening to us, on grizzly delisting and its dire ramifications for our people, and on DAPL. There is no separation between the two,” says Grier. Once fully executed, the treaty will be presented at what Chief Grier describes as “the highest offices of government in Washington, DC and Ottawa, and taken to the United Nations.” Significantly, one article of the historic document pronounces, “This treaty is analogous to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP).”

Piikani Nation Treaty

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