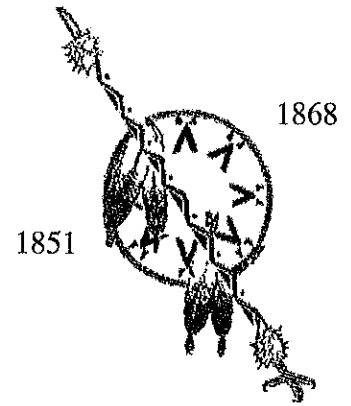


Oglala Sioux Tribe

Office of the President

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November 3, 2015

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

As President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe; I write to inform you that the Oglala Sioux Tribe strongly opposes the federal government's proposed removal of the Yellowstone grizzly bear from Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections through the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and informed FWS Director, Dan Ashe, of its position in a letter dated December 16, 2014. I am also the Chairman of the Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association (GPTCA) and I signed an official resolution of the GPTCA in opposition to this policy on December 19, 2014 that detailed tribal concerns arising from this issue. Last month the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council passed an official resolution against the delisting and trophy hunting of the grizzly bear, the strongest condemnation of this policy the tribe can make. Chief Arvol Looking Horse, 19th Generation Keeper of the Sacred Canunpa of the Oceti Sakowin (Great Sioux Nation) issued a statement in October 2014 that detailed the significance of the grizzly bear in Lakota, Dakota and Nakota culture, a relationship that has existed since time immemorial, that is reflected in the ceremonial and healing practices of the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota people. The Oglala Sioux Tribe (OST) is in full support of Chief Looking Horse's statement, and recognizes the grizzly as a relative, a healer and teacher of our people, as exemplified in narratives related to our ancestors, such as the revered defender of our culture, Crazy Horse.

The OST, like every other nation of the Oceti Sakowin (Great Sioux Nation), and the other forty or more Tribal Nations that oppose the delisting of the grizzly bear, object to the states of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho selling multiple-thousand dollar trophy hunting licenses to kill a being we consider to be sacred for "sport" in our ancestral homelands, and reject the states' designation of the grizzly as a "trophy game animal." The very idea of trophy hunting grizzly bears brings to mind a tragic episode in Lakota culture and the gravest injustice – the annexation of the Black Hills – precipitated by the 1874 "Black Hills Expedition" led by Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer and the 7th Cavalry that contravened the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. The most disturbing image from that illegal incursion is the one of Custer with a dead grizzly bear he "trophy hunted" in our sacred homelands – it is the image that represents the loss of the Black Hills and the desecration of our Holy Land.

The federal government recognizes the Oglala Sioux Tribe as one of the twenty-six Associated Tribes of Yellowstone, but it did not include the Oglala Sioux Tribe, or indeed any tribal nation, in the Conservation Strategy relative to its plans to delist the grizzly bear. Ignoring the tribal nations impacted by this proposal, an action that will take place upon our ancestral lands, speaks to the complete lack of respect accorded tribal nations in this process. The OST, along with every other Associated Tribe of Yellowstone, and tribal nations farther afield impacted by this policy, must be

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signatories of the Conservation Strategy and included in all subsequent discussions in the decision making process. Continuing to ignore tribal nations on this issue is a violation of tribal sovereignty, an attack on our religious and spiritual freedoms, and a clear violation of the federal trust responsibility.

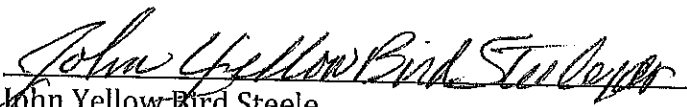
Contrary to the recent claims made by the FWS in the press, as President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, I have received no invitation from the FWS to initiate the formal consultation process on this issue that is mandated by a plethora of executive orders, secretarial orders, congressional acts and laws. By failing to do so, FWS remains in contravention of President Obama's most recent executive order related to tribal consultation, the President's 2013 Executive Order Establishing the White House Council on Native American Affairs, that further recognized that, "[g]reater engagement and meaningful consultation with tribes is of paramount importance in developing any policies affecting tribal nations." As one of the twenty-six federally recognized tribes the federal government acknowledges as having an ancestral connection to the region now known as Yellowstone National Park and Greater Yellowstone, the OST must be consulted by the FWS in a thorough manner consistent with the aforementioned orders and act, which requires FWS to meet individually with affected tribes to define a consultation timeline. The consultation process must take place and be concluded before any proposed delisting rule can be issued.

The OST stands in solidarity with the other tribal nations that have called for the Department of the Interior to institute a moratorium on the delisting of the Yellowstone grizzly bear so that a full, thorough, and meaningful tribal consultation process can take place, during which the points raised by each respective tribal nation in their official resolutions and declarations can be fully addressed and incorporated into future federal grizzly bear management plans and policy positions. A moratorium would also allow tribes to engage independent scientists to review the raw data the FWS is basing its decisions on, but as yet has refused to release to tribal nations or independent scientists. Transparency is essential for not only tribal members, but also the American people as a whole, to have any confidence in this process.

If there are any questions on my statement, please feel free to contact my office at (605) 867-8420 or you may email me at: JohnS@oglala.org.

Signed:

OGLALA SIOUX TRIBE


John Yellow Bird Steele
President