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To whom it may concern:

The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation stands in solidarity with not only our sister Shoshone tribes, but all of the tribal nations that have declared their opposition to the planned delisting of the Yellowstone grizzly bear from Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation supports the positions articulated by those tribal nations in their respective resolutions and declarations. The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation adds our collective voice to this effort to protect and preserve the sacred grizzly bear from the outdated management practices of state fish and wildlife agencies that favor killing over cultural and scientific alternatives.

The unprecedented nature of this tribal coalition in opposition to delisting the Yellowstone grizzly bear provides testament to the enormous significance of this sacred being within our cultures. We are many peoples, and we proudly retain much diversity within our traditions and cultures, but as can be seen, the grizzly is a constant among us.

The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation has an undeniable interest to this issue. Many of our tribal members are descended from those whom enjoyed a connection to the landscape now referred to as Greater Yellowstone since time immemorial. Our people, and the memberships of the other impacted tribes, retain unique insights into this landscape. Our ancestors are the only ones who had practical experience of what it was to live within these ecosystems when they were complete.

The historic Northwestern Band of Shoshone has been categorized as the most ecologically efficient of all of the peoples who lived with this landscape. The knowledge that our ancestors retained and passed down is truly the definition of the "best available science" as they lived it – they did not speculate upon the theoretic. Today, in the matter of the grizzly bear, their voices, through us, need to be heard.

The grizzly bear has a significant place in our culture. The grizzly bear is a sacred being, intricately tied to the ceremonies and practices of our people. Such is our respect for the grizzly that we refer to the Great Bear as our brother. Our ancestors learned from the grizzly bear; in the spring and summer the grizzly showed us staples of what became our traditional diet, such as roots, berries, lilies, and honey. In the fall, our people observed grizzlies feasting on pine nuts, which became a vital food source for us.

One of the greatest leaders of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation carried a name inspired by the grizzly bear. Mistranslated as "Chief Bear Hunter," his name, Wirasuap, more accurately describes how he was imbued by the grizzly bear's spirit. He was the bear chief to his people, weeta taikwahni, just as the grizzly is the chief of bears. On January 29, 1863, Wirasuap was among the victims of the heinous Massacre at Boa Ogoi perpetrated by Brig. Gen. Patrick E. Connor. It is known today as the Bear River Massacre, as our people referred to the river as the Big or Big Bear River, and wintered there. Once more the significance of the grizzly can be seen in our culture; as the grizzly returns to the womb of Mother Earth to winter, so our people sought comfort in an area that they associated with the bear. The Massacre at Boa Ogoi claimed more victims than the more widely known war crimes committed at Sand Creek and Wounded Knee.

Given the significance the grizzly bear holds in our culture, let there be no doubt that if the Yellowstone grizzly bear has its ESA protections removed and is subsequently trophy hunted by the states, our people will be detrimentally impacted. We consider the grizzly to be a relative, and our history is marked by the deaths of too many relatives at the hands of those who took pleasure in killing. In its attempts to delist the Yellowstone grizzly bear without regard to the ceremonial and religious practices of tribal people, the 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).

Abrogation of the AIRFA threatens potentially detrimental consequences not only for our religious and spiritual rights, but the sovereignty of all of the tribal nations impacted by this issue.

The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation has yet to be consulted by the federal government through FWS on this issue. Clearly we are not alone, as no meaningful attempt at initiating a thorough consultation process with the affected tribes has been opened. Three restrictive "broad area" meetings proposed to one tribal body with a deadline of "early spring" for the process's conclusion does not constitute meaningful tribal consultation as required by Executive Order 13175, executed by President Clinton, and reaffirmed by President Obama's 2009 memorandum on federal-tribal relations. At the time of writing, thirty-two tribal nations have submitted written opposition and petitioned for consultation.

President Obama's 2013 Executive Order Establishing the White House Council on Native American Affairs further recognized that "[g]reater engagement and meaningful consultation with tribes is of paramount importance in developing any policies affecting tribal nations." On the matter of the delisting of the Yellowstone grizzly bear, this has not occurred. FWS is bound by the US Departments of Interior and Commerce order of June 5, 1997, that specifies tribal consultation obligations in the context of the ESA. "Meaningful consultation" with tribal nations is not optional – it is a requirement of our unique nation-to-nation relationship with the federal government that requires consultation to be held at a government-to-government level. FWS has yet to even meet the criteria of Secretarial Order 3206.

Under the circumstances, the most appropriate course of action is for a moratorium to be instituted, under which all of the impacted tribal nations can be consulted, including respective tribal governments

(executive and legislative branches), and recognized spiritual leaders. Yellowstone and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is a matrix of sacred and cultural sites of great significance to our peoples, and those tribes' with Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) should be engaged in an initial process of consultation consistent with the criteria of the THPOs designated mission (Section 101(d)(2) of the National Historic Preservation Act).

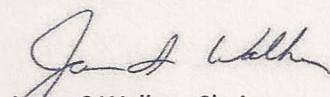
A moratorium would also provide an opportunity for tribal nations to review the raw data the FWS is basing all of its conclusions upon relative to delisting the grizzly bear. The overwhelming majority of affected tribal nations have already called upon the FWS to release that data not only to the affected tribal nations, but also to independent scientists for analysis and review. The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation adds our voice to that call. The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation stands in unity with the other tribal nations in GOAL Tribal Coalition and respectfully urges the Secretary of the Interior to institute a moratorium on the planned delisting of the Yellowstone grizzly bear.

Our ancestors taught us that the mountains, streams and plains stand forever, and that the seasons "walk around them" annually. This cycle of life is incomplete without the grizzly bear. It is misleading to designate the grizzly bear in the Greater Yellowstone region as the "Yellowstone grizzly bear," and the grizzly bear in the country of the Blackfeet as the "Northern Continental Divide grizzly bear," as they are not different, they are the same species. They are the descendants of the grizzly that once inhabited most of what became the Western United States, but today, not unlike tribal people, they survive on less than 2% of their original country. With only 2% of their historic population, the grizzly bear cannot be considered a recovered species appropriate for removal from ESA protections, and the imposition of misleading designations in isolated pockets does not make them so. The grizzly bear must be considered within the context of the entirety of its historic domain pre-European contact. Many areas of biologically suitable habitat exist where the grizzly once roamed, all of them in ancestral tribal homelands where our ancestors walked, and where the grizzly should walk again.

Until the issues raised in this letter are addressed and resolved to the satisfaction of all of the affected tribal nations, the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation believes that it is both inappropriate and premature to even consider issuing a new Rule to delist the iconic Yellowstone grizzly bear from ESA protections. Our ancestors walked here. Those yet unborn will walk here, too. We must ensure that the grizzly bear is here to walk with them. Extinction is forever, and delisting the grizzly bears in Greater Yellowstone will doom them to the inevitable fate of an island population.

Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation Resolution # 4-3-15 officially opposes the delisting of the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear.

Respectfully,



Jason S Walker, Chairman
Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation