

# BEAR CENTER FACT SHEET

March 8, 2016

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The WSU Bear Research, Conservation, and Education Center: Expanding our understanding of grizzly bears

## Introduction

- The Bear Research, Conservation, and Education Center at WSU is the only one of its kind in the nation.
- For 28 years, the WSU Bear Center has expanded our knowledge of grizzly bears. New understanding of how grizzlies have adapted and evolved in a changing world helps wild bears and their ecosystems survive, while also helping advance human health.

## Center and bear history

- Grizzly bears once roamed from Alaska to Mexico, with a population of 100,000.
- Today, grizzly bears outside of Alaska have been eliminated from 99 percent of their range and have declined in numbers to approximately 1,600. Significant populations are restricted to the Yellowstone and Northern Continental Divide. Very small populations inhabit the North Cascades of Washington and the Selkirk Mountains of Washington and Idaho.
- The WSU bear program was established in 1986. Federal and state biologists responsible for understanding and managing wild grizzly bears occasionally wanted to use captive bears in their studies. They found that zoos do not have the resources or sample sizes of bears to obtain meaningful data. The WSU Bear Center fulfills that need.

## Bears at the center

- The Bear Center is home to roughly a dozen grizzlies on average, including males, females and cubs, either born there or brought here by wildlife officers. Commonly, bears come because they have been orphaned or habituated to humans.
- Research at the Bear Center covers a range of disciplines, including nutrition, physiology, ecology, behavior, reproduction, and learning and memory. Bears at the Center are trained from birth to take part in humane, approved research. They can open their mouths on command, paw or nose touch to visual cues, and present their chest or flanks for inspection, minimizing the need for sedation.

### **Research helps bears and people**

- Discoveries at the center can help maintain a healthy population of wild bears.
- Researchers have learned how to understand grizzlies' diets by analyzing a single hair, helping scientists know if bears get enough of the right foods to eat. This helps us learn how wild bears are recovering and if they have enough habitat to meet their food needs.
- We've learned that salmon-eating bears are extremely important in moving nutrients from the ocean back to the land, and that human activities that disrupt foraging can seriously harm bears.
- At the same time, bears' remarkable adaptations may hold the key to helping solve human health problems.
- Grizzly bears hibernate for about five months out of the year, and don't eat, drink, urinate, or defecate during that time. Studies of how bears' hearts work during hibernation may help fight heart disease.
- Bed-ridden patients may benefit from studies on how bears maintain muscle strength and mass during hibernation, essentially exercising while they sleep. Bears are able to acquire massive amounts of fat and remain completely healthy, which may shed light on obesity.

### **Staff and facilities**

- Five faculty researchers, five graduate students, and as many as seven undergraduate volunteers staff the center, which has six indoor-outdoor dens/runs, a 2.2-acre exercise yard, a kitchen with walk-in refrigerator and freezer, and a medical room. Each bear gets time in the outdoor yard every day.

### **New bear center**

- A new International Bear Center has been proposed to replace the current center, increasing capacity for bears, staff and research. The new center will include 18 housing units with dens and 20 acres of natural environments: Two five-acre yards and one 10-acre yard, with pools. Initial costs are estimated at \$20 million.
- The new facility will house both grizzly bears and polar bears. It offers a place for new on-site learning opportunities, educational visits and outreach programs.
- The center is located at the corner of Grimes Way and Terre View Drive in Pullman. Visit the center website at <http://cahnrs.wsu.edu/soe/facilities/bears/>