

Biological Opinion for the Effects to Grizzly Bear and Bull Trout from the Implementation of Proposed Actions Associated with Plans of Operation for Sterling Corporation Rock Creek Silver/Copper Mine (U.S.F.W.S. Dec. 15 2000).

[The proposed project assumes] that displacement areas would meet the habitat conditions necessary for displaced bears and that bears would actually use the displacement areas outside their established home range. In some cases grizzly bears would likely attempt to remain and survive in a home range impacted by activity.

Biological Opinion at 60.

Displacement of grizzly bears from established home ranges into other habitat comes at a high cost to an animal that is highly dependent upon learned food sources. . . . Moving into new territory requires more exploratory time to learn the most productive feeding areas and exposes the new bear to greater risks of predation by male bears or exposure to humans. The change in traditional behavior also increases the chances of a bear encountering human food sources that can lead to habituation and the necessity of control actions

Id. at 60.

Association with people invariably leads to a similar end, although individual situations may vary. Bears that do not avoid human activities are more vulnerable. Bears close to roads or human habituation are more likely to be shot, food habituated, hit by cars, or removed by control agents to reduce risks to humans or their property. The end results is removal of the bear from the ecosystem.

Id. at 62

The Rock Creek Project, when coupled with Montanore and other projects in the Cabinets, would create a strip across BMU 5 and 6 that could partially sever the lower third of the Cabinet portion of the CYE from the rest of the CYE. Should private patents get developed or used in a way that displace or threaten bears, the fragmentation would be even more significant. . . . [A]n estimated 31 percent of the CYE [bears] may be forced to change traditional movement patterns and behaviors People coming to the area because of real or perceived opportunities associated with the Rock Creek Project will accelerate the fragmentation, probably permanently.

Id. at 64.

These activities potentially could disturb the north-south movement corridor, described in the BA, constricting the secure habitat for bears to less than 2 miles wide in [Bear Management Units] 4, 5, and 6. Much of the affected area is scree habitat (exposed rock) and steep topography, which may further force bears into contact with people in insecure habitat with related mortality risks, could increase adverse intra-species conflicts with other bears, or will displace them from essential habitat to the extent that significant impacts to reproduction and survival could result. Habitat acquisition to offset the impacts is not guaranteed to occur within this constricted area, and road closures cannot be guaranteed under regulations providing access to private property (ANILCA). There are also dozens of other mining claims (unpatented) that have occasional activity that potentially impact bears.

Even if other patents are not developed during the active life of the mine, the potential of activities at Montanore, the Rock Creek Project, and other established uses in BMU's 4, 5 and 6 coupled with the increased recreational and hunting use is likely to severely fragment the ecosystem and jeopardize the population.

Id. at 73