

GRIZZLY BEAR

Ursus arctos (Endangered Colorado, Threatened Federally)

“**W**HEN THE GRIZZLY is gone, we shall have lost the most sublime specimen of wildlife that exalts the western

wilderness.” Those words, coined by John McGuire, founder of *Outdoor Life* magazine, stand as a warning to those who have neglected the plight of this storied member of the ecosystem.

One of the largest members of the bear family, grizzlies may exceed 1,000 pounds and stretch up to 8 feet tall. Grizzlies are usually brown in color, and adults often have white-tipped hairs along the back, a distinction that resulted in the common name “silvertip.”

Although the silver-tipped fur, the large size and a hump on the back are all considered characteristics of the grizzly, the best way to distinguish the species is by its concave muzzle or snout that differs from the rounded snout of the more common black bear. In addition, the grizzly’s claws on the front feet are much longer than the black bear.

Although its name came from its grizzled coat and not its fearsome temper, authors have depicted grizzlies as terrifying animals that followed the herds of bison and attacked men without provocation. Even today, grizzlies fear no other animal in the wild, and they’re capable of hunting and killing most animals.

The federal government now lists grizzlies as threatened in the United States outside of Alaska, and they are classified as endangered in Colorado. Prior to colonization by European man, grizzlies were common throughout Colorado, including the eastern plains. The last

documented grizzly in Colorado was killed in 1979 when it attacked bow hunter Ed Wiseman in the south San Juan Mountains. Two others were killed in 1951.

Conflicts with man and the encroach-



There is little chance that grizzly bears exist in the wild in Colorado. Pictured is a captive adult grizzly bear.

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ing civilization resulted in the elimination of grizzlies from Colorado. There’s little chance that any grizzly bears still exist in the state. If they do, they are extremely rare and their numbers would be too low to be considered a viable population.

In September 1989, the Wildlife Commission passed a resolution opposing the reintroduction of grizzly bears into Colorado until such time that the state is included in a federal recovery plan and the plan has received favorable public review.