

Otter supports grizzly shooter

By DAVID COLE/Staff writer | Posted: Thursday, August 25, 2011 12:00 am

COEUR d'ALENE - Idaho Gov. Butch Otter told the Obama administration in a letter this week that he supports the right of a North Idaho man who killed a grizzly bear to defend himself and his family.

Jeremy M. Hill, 33, shot and killed a grizzly on his 20-acre property near Porthill on May 8, and his lawyer said Tuesday they would be arguing self-defense and protection of family. Hill pleaded not guilty in U.S. District Court Tuesday.

"I recognize the federal jurisdiction under the Endangered Species Act, but I strongly support the right of individuals to defend themselves and others in such situations," Otter wrote to Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar in an Aug. 22 letter.

"Many, including me, feel Mr. Hill did what a concerned parent would do. Now, Jeremy and his family must endure the cost of a trial," the Republican governor said.

He said the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service needs to consider the impacts to grizzly bear recovery efforts because of Hill's case.

"There is a great public outcry about this issue, and prosecution may further damage community support for recovery efforts," he wrote.

He added that there must be flexibility for citizens to protect their loved ones and property.

"One of the flaws of the ESA is the premium it places on protecting species at the expense of everything else," Otter said. "Although an individual can protect human safety under the law - as Jeremy felt he was doing - it's a shame that the Endangered Species Act still does not enable citizens to protect their private property and pets in the same manner."

He finished by saying that there is no dispute Hill killed a grizzly. The dispute, he said, appears to be over the reason for shooting the bear.

"I would sincerely appreciate your looking into this case and assisting in any way you can," he wrote.

The Boundary County commissioners wrote a letter to the governor asking for help.

"We feel that at all costs, this man has the obligation and responsibility to protect his children," the commissioners wrote in their Aug. 22 letter. "This is not some flagrant or malicious act. We urge you to do all that is in your power to have this matter settled."

Hill's father, Mike Hill, told The Press that three grizzly bears, a mother and two cubs, wandered onto his son's property.

He said the bears were spotted buy some of Jeremy Hill's six kids, who had been outside playing. They called to their father, who was inside the house.

He came out with a rifle and shot and killed one of the bears, then called authorities to report the death.

It has been reported that it was the mother that was killed, but Mike Hill said it was one of the cubs. U.S. Attorney Wendy Olson declined on Wednesday to say which bear was shot and killed.

The bears were five miles outside a grizzly recovery zone and next to Highway 1.

Jeremy Hill was charged with the killing, a misdemeanor, earlier this month. If convicted, he faces up to a year in prison and a \$50,000 fine.

The grizzly bear is a threatened species in the lower 48 states, and protected by federal law.