

Shameful Conklin Bear Slaughter

Alberta's wildlife management reputation sustained another bloody nose in August in a scene reminiscent of the bad old days of the 1950s. Twelve black bears were shot and killed by Fish and Wildlife officers at a garbage dump in Conklin near Fort McMurray. Over the past summer, the bears had become used to feeding on the easily-accessible garbage and, quite incredibly, nothing had been done to stop them.

Although most of the justifiable public outrage was directed at wildlife officials who made the decision to shoot the bears, it is difficult to conceive why the situation was ever allowed to get so bad in the first place. AWA is outraged that no-one in government or industry ensured the dump was properly fenced. Why, when forestry and oil and gas field camps are obliged by law to handle their garbage so that wildlife is not attracted, was this dump at Conklin not held to that standard? Why wasn't it immediately shut down when government officials became aware of the problem? It certainly looks like it was easier for the government to pay for twelve bullets than to ensure that landfill operators fulfilled their responsibilities.

Responses from officials were quick and consistent: it was all somebody else's fault. Darcy Whiteside, spokesman for Alberta Sustainable Resource Development pointed out that "Alberta Environment and the municipality are responsible for ensuring proper fencing is in place to protect bears and humans." Trevor Gemmell, from Alberta Environment, in turn pointed out that "(w)ith these types of landfills, we rely on the operator and Sustainable Resource Development to work together to identify any nuisance wildlife issues." And, according to the Edmonton Journal, nobody from Alberta Environment or Sustainable Resource Development contacted Jarrod Peckford, supervisor of solid waste service for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, the man in charge of the dump. Shooting the bears "was their decision," Peckford said.

Notably absent from these responses was any suggestion that lessons will



Twelve "problem" black bears shot by government staff in Conklin are more casualties of the province's "war on wildlife". PHOTO: N. DOUGLAS

be learned from this shameful event – admittedly these would be lessons AWA thought had been learned 50 years ago. According to a spokesman for Sustainable Resource Development, quoted in the Edmonton Journal, between 75 and 280 bears have been killed every year since 2001. As Kerry Diotte of the *Edmonton Sun* pointed out "there was no news release ... There would have been no news of it at all had it not been for an angry whistle-blower."

Would we be wrong to worry that the only lesson learned here may be to make sure that, the next time garbage-habituated animals are killed, officers ensure no-one is watching?

- Nigel Douglas

No-Net-Loss Wetlands Policy stopped by Tar Sands Industry Opposition

The Government of Alberta still has not announced the wetland policy it promised

would be released by the summer of 2009. Time is running out for a wetland protection policy to be produced that could influence the important land-use planning process underway in Alberta's northeast Lower Athabasca region, a region where wetlands are a central landscape feature. Alberta Wilderness Association asks you, our readers and supporters, to urge Environment Minister Rob Renner to implement a no-net-loss provincial wetland policy to better protect our boreal wetlands as soon as possible.

As we reported in the October 2008 *Wild Lands Advocate*, the extension of a wetland policy to apply for the first time to Alberta's Green Zone (non-settled public lands) is long overdue. A multi-stakeholder Wetland Policy Team met from 2005 to 2008; the Team's report was forwarded by the Alberta Water Council to the Alberta Environment Minister in September 2008. Unfortunately,