



Black Bears Sacrificed at Conklin

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Sadly, twelve fine black bears were sacrificed by Fish and Wildlife officials at Conklin earlier this week because of the carelessness of humans. AWA is calling for an independent investigation of the incident and for charges to be laid if negligence is found related to the improper fencing and the feeding of bears by local residents. The AWA is also asking for information as to whether this is a unique or more commonplace occurrence in the bear country of rural Alberta.

Conklin is a small town south of Fort McMurray, in the heart of the boreal forest where black bears are an integral part of the ecology. The bears were shot at the garbage dump near the town after PTI Conklin Lodge called in a complaint. This lodge provides housing for several hundred forestry and oil and gas workers. The attractiveness of this dump to bears must have been long known to the lodge, Conklin residents, Alberta Environment officials and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development personnel.

AWA is outraged that no one in government, industry or the local community took the responsibility to ensure 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, is this dump at Conklin not held to the same standard? Why wasn't it immediately shut down when government officials became aware of the problem? "This is just one in a series of incidents that is representative of Alberta's ongoing *war on wildlife*," said Cliff Wallis, AWA Vice-President.

"The scene at Conklin seems taken from the 1950s instead of 2009," said Vivian Pharis, AWA Board member. "Sixty years ago every small Canadian town had a garbage pit, coulee or riverbank where, out of sight and out of mind, everything was eventually thrown. These dumps often provided townsfolk with entertainment as they were often picturesque and attracted wildlife, particularly bears, for viewing. Even Banff's dump used to be a must-see for tourists wanting to observe bears. We now know that this was wildlife and people management at its worst. Thankfully, open garbage pits are largely a thing of the past. Steps must be taken to ensure that this scene is never repeated again."

Ironically, just as the chance photo of a cute ground squirrel has drawn global attention to Alberta's beauty and wildlife, the story of the senseless slaughter of twelve black bears has the potential to bring Alberta global condemnation.

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