



Release Date: June 19, 2008

Grizzly Recovery in Alberta: “Was That It?”

The recent surprise dismissal of Alberta's provincial Grizzly Bear Recovery Team has left grizzly bear supporters scratching their heads and asking: “Was that it?” The multi-stakeholder Recovery Team was informed this week that its services are no longer required: just as the province's grizzly recovery process is set to begin.

“This comes as a total surprise for all of those who have provided input to the recovery process for the past six years,” says Nigel Douglas, Alberta Wilderness Association conservation specialist. “The Recovery Plan was finally approved in April, but it's just paper in the end. Everybody believed that it would be the role of the Recovery Team to see that it was actually implemented.”

In a recent letter from Ken Ambrock, Assistant Deputy Minister of Sustainable Resource Development (SRD), the Team was informed that “with the finalization of the plan, the work of the Recovery Team is complete.” This is in total contrast to the Recovery Plan itself, which states “The Team assists the Minister... with Plan implementation,” and goes on to stress that “the Plan is a dynamic document. The initial life span of the Plan is five years, during which the Team will meet at least annually to review and update the Plan as required.”

“Six years of grizzly recovery has resulted in a 68-page plan, a suspension of the grizzly hunt and more than \$2 million spent on counting bears,” says Douglas. “Unfortunately it has also seen precisely nothing done to protect grizzly bear habitat.”

The provincial Grizzly Bear Recovery Team was formed in 2002, in response to recommendations from government scientists that the grizzly be designated as a “threatened species.” The Team worked to produce the provincial Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan, which was finally approved by Ted Morton, Minister of SRD, in April 2008.

Conservationists believe that, far from being “complete,” the process of grizzly recovery is only just beginning. “Protection of grizzly habitat is the only thing that will recover grizzlies,” says Douglas. “Without that, everything that has happened so far has been a waste of time and money.”

The Alberta public is still awaiting the results of the \$2 million grizzly population studies carried out in 2007, year four of a five-year detailed population study. The previous three years of surveys have consistently found less bears than were expected, leading many grizzly bear scientists to believe that the population now stands at less than 500 bears.

Conservation groups continue to call for the designation of the grizzly as a “threatened” species, as recommended by government scientists six years ago.

For more information:

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