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Minister Ignores Science to OK Spring Grizzly Bear Hunt

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On February 2, 2004 Minister of Sustainable Resource Development (SRD), Mike Cardinal announced that grizzly bears will once again be hunted this spring. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) has consistently argued that any decisions affecting Alberta's grizzly population should be based on sound science. This decision has failed to do so.

The decision to continue with a spring hunt has been made despite overwhelming scientific evidence that Alberta's grizzlies are in serious trouble. SRD's Grizzly Bear Recovery Team has called for a postponement to the hunt. The government's Endangered Species Conservation Committee has also recommended that the grizzly should be declared a 'threatened' species (which would lead to an automatic suspension of the hunt).

The announcement will allow for 73 hunting licences to be issued – down from 101 last year. But last year's reduction (from 130 licences the previous year) led to an increase in the number of bears killed. In spring 2003, 18 bears were killed during the spring hunt, the second highest number in a decade. As access into grizzly bear habitat continues to increase, so it becomes easier to hunt bears. Decreases in the number of hunters are outweighed by an increase in the ease of access.

The spring grizzly hunt is not an issue of hunters versus conservationists. Many hunters consider themselves as conservationists, or "stewards" of our wild spaces. Many of AWA's supporters are keen hunters, who recognize that the grizzly hunt cannot continue if population levels are too low to sustain it.

The real worry is that a number of serious measures need to be adopted if we are not going to lose Alberta's grizzly bears completely. Suspending the spring hunt would be the first small, relatively simple measure. If we can't take even this relatively easy step, then it does not bode well for the major battles that are still to come.

