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## Clarification of Grizzly Bear Status

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'Threatened', 'endangered', 'red list', 'blue list', 'species at risk'... There is a confusing variety of endangered species designations, depending on whether one is looking at provincial, federal or international criteria. Alberta's grizzly bears fall within a number of different categories.

### International Status

In the grizzly article in the December 2003 edition of *Wild Lands Advocate* reference was made to World Conservation Union (IUCN) population guidelines. The IUCN Red List suggests that a population of 1000 mature individuals would be listed as 'vulnerable' and would therefore be "considered to be facing a high risk of extinction in the wild".

It should be emphasized however that IUCN criteria refer to global populations and not regional populations. Alberta's grizzly bears, although they are relatively isolated geographically by the Continental Divide, and fragmented by man-made barriers such as the TransCanada Highway and Highway 3 through the Crowsnest Pass, do not count as a distinct population as defined by IUCN. The IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria can be viewed at [www.redlist.org/info/categories\\_criteria.html](http://www.redlist.org/info/categories_criteria.html). Thank you to Chris Shank for his comments.

### Provincial Status

In 2000, the provincial government's *The General Status of Alberta's Wild Species* ([http://www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/fw/status/2000/2000\\_General\\_Status\\_Species\\_Rpt.pdf](http://www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/fw/status/2000/2000_General_Status_Species_Rpt.pdf)), defined grizzlies as: **May be at Risk** ("May be at risk of extirpation but may require special attention or protection to prevent it from becoming at risk.")

In 2000 the government's Endangered Species Sub Committee recommended to Mike Cardinal, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, that the grizzly should be a 'threatened' species.

These reports, however, were both derived from outdated population estimates, which put the population at around 1000 individuals. Last year's *Report on Alberta Grizzly Bear Assessment and Allocation* ([www.AlbertaWilderness.ca](http://www.AlbertaWilderness.ca)) revised this figure down to 500 individuals on provincial land, with a further 185 in the National Parks.

### National Status

The new *Federal Species at Risk Act 2003* ([www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca](http://www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca)) defines the grizzly bear (northwestern population) as: "Special Concern, on Schedule 3; pending public consultation for addition to Schedule 1".

- **Special concern species:** a wildlife species that may become a threatened or an endangered species because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.
- **Schedule 1:** is the official list of species that are classified as extirpated, endangered, threatened, and of special concern.

Whatever criteria you use, it remains certain that the situation for grizzly bears in Alberta is serious. If nothing is done to address the fundamental problems of habitat destruction and fragmentation, then the situation is only going to continue to get worse.

