



Release Date: January 20, 2005

Optimism that New Minister Will End Grizzly Bear Hunt

Environmental groups are optimistic that a change in Minister will lead to a long-awaited suspension of the spring grizzly bear hunt in Alberta. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) has consistently argued that Alberta's grizzly population is not large enough to support hunting. We are calling for the new Minister of Sustainable Resource Development (SRD), David Coumts, to listen to the recommendations of his own scientists, and to suspend the hunt.

"Minister Coumts is expected to announce in the next few days whether Alberta's spring grizzly bear hunt will go ahead," says AWA Conservation Specialist, Nigel Douglas. "We hope that a change of Minister will bring about a more enlightened attitude to the plight of Alberta's troubled grizzlies." The latest scientific estimates of Alberta's grizzly bear population is less than 700 individuals.

Previous Minister of SRD, Mike Cardinal, did not act on the recommendations of government scientists and continued issuing hunting licences every spring. The Alberta Endangered Species Conservation Committee (ESCC) recommended to the Minister in 2002 that the grizzly bear be listed as '*Threatened*' under the Wildlife Act, which would have led to an automatic suspension of the hunt. He declined to accept their recommendation. Instead Minister Cardinal set up a provincial Grizzly Bear Recovery Team, which is also expected to recommend soon to the current minister that a spring grizzly hunt is not sustainable.

In 2003, 73 hunting licenses were issued, down from 101 the previous year. Although the number of bears killed was down to four from the previous year's eighteen, this was partly due to the deep snow cover in the early part of the hunting season.

A suspension of the grizzly hunt is the first of many major steps that need to be taken if we are going to keep grizzly bears in Alberta. Other vital measures include:

- Designate the grizzly as a 'threatened' species, as recommended by the government's Endangered Species Sub Committee and Grizzly Bear Recovery Team.
- Prevent the loss of grizzly habitat. Legislated protection of key habitat areas, such as the Bighorn, Castle and Chinchaga is vital.
- Introduce measures to reduce the enormous network of industrial roads throughout the foothills and boreal forest.

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