

Mar. 3, 2005

The Honourable Ralph Klein,
Premier of Alberta,
10800 – 97 Ave
Edmonton, AB
T5K 2B6

RE: LISTING THE ALBERTA GRIZZLY BEAR AS A THREATENED SPECIES

In 2002 the Alberta Endangered Species Conservation Committee (ESCC) recommended that the Alberta grizzly bear be listed as a threatened species. This recommendation was based on an assessment of the grizzly bear's biological status by the ESCC scientific subcommittee (SSC). The SSC is made up of independent scientists who review the best scientific information available on a species that may be at risk in Alberta. As per government policy, the Scientific Subcommittee uses the species evaluation method used by the IUCN (now the World Conservation Union, formerly the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources).

According to this assessment the SCC found the grizzly bear meets the criteria for the Regional Red List category "vulnerable." Specifically, the SCC found that the population is "very small" (less than 1000 mature breeding individuals), and that "dispersal and exchange with adjacent populations is limited."

Although the exact number of grizzly bears in Alberta is unknown, the best scientific estimates suggest there are between 500 (Stenhouse et. al. 2003) and 1000 (SRD 2001). The draft grizzly bear recovery plan estimates there are 700.

The best available science suggests the number of mature breeding individual grizzly bears in a given population is 35 to 69 per cent of the total population. This suggests that the maximum number of mature breeding individuals is less than 700. This is a small population that meets the criterion for the IUCN Regional Red List Category "vulnerable" (VU D1). The equivalent Alberta legislative status is "threatened."

Although this fact alone satisfies one of the criteria for listing the grizzly bear as a threatened species in Alberta, other factors threaten the long-term persistence of grizzly bears in Alberta. In reaching our conclusion for classification of grizzly bears under threatened status, we considered the combined effects of the following factors:

- Documented range contraction; range has declined 2/3 from historic levels;
- Documented genetic and demographic fragmentation along highways in the southern half of grizzly range in Alberta;
- Large areas of potentially lethal contact with humans on the eastern edge of grizzly bear distribution;
- Unknown, and potentially decreasing population trends;
- Potentially unsustainable mortality rates, particularly among females.

Alberta policy sets a goal of maintaining viable populations of grizzly bears. According to Section 3.1.1 ("Resource Protection"), the Fish and Wildlife Policy of Alberta (Alberta Fish and Wildlife 1982) states that "the primary consideration of the Government is to ensure that wildlife populations are protected from severe decline and that viable populations are maintained."

According to the policy statement of the ESCC, the conservation and recovery of threatened and endangered species are shared values of the committee and Albertans. The statement goes on to say that "the biological status of species should be determined by independent scientists using the best available science" and that "in accordance with the precautionary principle as stated in the *Accord for Protection of Species at Risk in Canada*, where the balance of scientific information indicates a species is at risk, conservation and protective measure will be taken."

It is in this political and ecological context that we, the undersigned, support the recommendation of the ESCC and strongly urge the Government of Alberta to formally list the grizzly bear as a threatened species before grizzly bears emerge from their dens in 2005.

Sincerely,

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