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## Grizzly Bears Face Defining Year

By Nigel Douglas

The year 2006 is shaping up to be a defining year for the future of Alberta's grizzly bears. The Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Team finished its draft Recovery Plan in December 2004. After being passed around various government departments, it ended up on the desk of the Minister for Sustainable Resource Development in June 2005. The final Recovery Plan is expected to be released by the end of the year.

What happens next is anybody's guess. Will the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan morph into something as pale and listless as the recently rubber-stamped Caribou Recovery Plan? Will the Minister accept the Team's recommendations to listen to government scientists who have been recommending since 2002 that the grizzly bear should be listed as a "threatened" species (which would bring about an automatic hunting ban)? Will there be any significant changes to on-the-ground habitat disturbance, which has been the driving force for all of the grizzly bear's problems in Alberta? In short, will the Recovery Plan actually recover grizzlies?

The jury is out on this question. The Caribou Recovery Plan established committees, created planning teams, "promoted" industry best practice and called for continued "discussion" with other governments. The only practical actions appeared to involve killing wolves. If the Grizzly Bear Recovery plan is full of motherhood statements, "recommending" action and "promoting" best practices, then the future for Alberta's grizzlies will indeed be very gloomy.

But if there is a will to change the status quo, to adopt measures to protect grizzly bear habitat in a meaningful way, then maybe there is hope. In late January every year, the Minister makes his decision on whether the spring grizzly bear hunt will take place that year. This will be an important early test of whether there is the will to make room for grizzlies to continue to roam the Alberta landscape into the future. It is important that the Minister hears from people who care whether or not grizzlies continue to exist in Alberta.

Send your comments to: The Hon. David Coutts, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development  
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