



Release Date: May 7, 2007

Government silent on grizzly bear numbers: *Deja vue for conservationists*

Conservation groups are once again calling on the government to release the results of their DNA-based grizzly bear population analysis. The latest phase of the multi-year study was completed early this spring but it has still not been released to the public.

“The government’s commitment to openness and transparency seems to be trumped by its historical tradition of keeping bad news out of the public domain for as long as possible,” says Jim Pissot with Defenders of Wildlife Canada.

The results of the first phase of this multi-phase provincial grizzly bear population study in 2005 were kept from the public for over a year and only released in March of 2006 after public outrage was voiced at the long delay. The second phase of the DNA-based study was also released last March, three months after completion. Together the two studies estimated only 87 grizzly bears from Highway 1 through to Highway 16 – much fewer than previously thought.

The latest study, covering grizzly bear habitat south from Highways 1 to Highway 3 was completed in early March. In April, an error was found in one of the DNA samples and the results had to be re-calculated. The government has had the revised results for over 3 weeks now, and despite repeated assurances that the results would be released imminently, the data still remain out of the public domain and conservationists worry the government is falling back on its old stalling tactics.

“There’s no excuse for keeping the report from the public,” says Tracey Henderson with the Grizzly Bear Alliance. “We can only assume that they are slow to release the data because, once again, the news is not good.”

In 2002 the province’s Endangered Species Conservation Committee (ESCC) recommended the grizzly bear be listed as a threatened species under the provincial Wildlife Act. At the time the government said that more accurate population data was needed before they would make any change in designation of the species. Every study and analysis done since that time has suggested a much smaller bear population than the 1000 bears estimated in 2002.

Conservationists are hopeful that with the release of this latest phase of the study the government will finally make a decision on listing the species and implement the draft recovery plan that has been finished since December 2004.

“Once the latest data are released, we will have a very accurate estimate of the number of grizzly bears found within the best bear habitat in the province,” says Nigel Douglas with Alberta Wilderness Association. “By all indications, that number will be frightfully low and the government will no longer have any excuse for inaction.”

For more information:

Dr. Tracey Henderson, Grizzly Bear Alliance: 403-678-8532
Nigel Douglas, Alberta Wilderness Association: 403-283-2025
Jim Pissot, Defenders of Wildlife Canada: 403-678-0016

