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Alberta's Grizzly Bear Numbers are Worse than Ever

Groups ask for "Endangered" listing with release of latest population data

Startling new findings suggest that Alberta's grizzly bear population now stands at fewer than 500 bears, or half of what was previously believed. Grizzlies appear to be on the road to extinction in Alberta unless significant changes are made to how grizzly bear habitat is managed.

Results from the third year of detailed grizzly population studies, focusing on the area between Highways 1 and 3, show a population of 90 bears. When added to previous estimates released in 2006 for the area between Highways 1 and 16, there are a total of 177 grizzly bears in the southern half of the province.

"These numbers are low enough to warrant listing as an Endangered species under Alberta's Wildlife Act," says Tracey Henderson with the Grizzly Bear Alliance (GBA). The GBA, Alberta Wilderness Association and Defenders of Wildlife Canada assert that, given the relatively low density of bears in the north and the small area left to census between Highway 3 and the US border, the total population in Alberta is less than 500 bears.

The groups are asking for a moratorium on all new development in critical grizzly bear habitat, until the government implements the recovery plan.

"Its time for change - change in how we manage the landscape - or we could see the grizzly disappear from provincial lands in Alberta within this century," says Jim Pissot, Defenders of Wildlife Canada. "The government has a draft recovery plan that has been collecting dust for two and a half years. It's time they pulled it off the shelf, strengthened it, and funded the recovery of Alberta's endangered grizzlies."

In 2002, the government's Endangered Species Conservation Committee recommended the species be listed as "Threatened" under the province's *Wildlife Act*, based on an estimated population size of 1000. Since that time over \$1.25 million tax dollars have supported the new population estimate work which has yielded an accurate count for grizzlies from Highway 3 in the south to Highway 16 in the north. There are still two more phases left in the study but results to date are so low, there's little hope that numbers in the remaining areas will be enough to bring the population to 500 bears.

"Premier Stelmach has already said that he will not be using the brakes on Alberta's economic juggernaut," says Nigel Douglas with Alberta Wilderness Association. "Until this changes, grizzly bears will continue to be the road-kill."

"The good news is that it's not too late to save the grizzly and we know how to do it," says Henderson. "We just need the political will to make it happen."

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