

**Wild Lands Advocate, June 2008, Vol. 16, No. 3****Grizzly Bears**

By Nigel Douglas

Reaction to the long-awaited release of the provincial *Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan* in April has been distinctly underwhelming. The multi-stakeholder Grizzly Bear Recovery Team met between 2002 and 2004, and presented the first draft of the recovery plan to government in 2004. Since then it has been through a tortuous review process by government staff, as well as international grizzly bear experts.

The recovery plan lays the framework for a successful recovery process, but unless there is the financial support and the political will to implement it, grizzly bears are unlikely to benefit. Central to grizzly bear recovery in Alberta is habitat protection, a fact acknowledged in the recovery plan: "The greatest risk of habitat loss is the cumulative effects of human activity; hence the need to monitor the footprint and initiate habitat conservation and enhancement as required." But what is conspicuously lacking is any mechanism for actually dealing with habitat protection.

The recovery plan recommends the establishment of Grizzly Priority Areas (GPAs) "to maintain habitat quality and ensure low risk of mortality." (An earlier draft referred to Grizzly Conservation Areas [GCAs], but the word "conservation" was apparently deemed unacceptable.) But at the same time it was recognized that better management in these GPAs is not enough: *all* grizzly habitat needs better management. A 2006 draft of the plan stated, "Additional activities, including agriculture, facility development and operation (industrial and recreational), recreational activities, and OHV use also need to be addressed through appropriate management *within and outside of GCAs*" (emphasis added). The disappearance of this statement from the final plan is a serious concern.

Although there have been some small steps, including the suspension of the spring grizzly bear hunt from 2006 to 2008 (recently extended for one more year) and considerable advancements in surveying of bears, it is important to place the entire recovery process in the context of the question, "How is this going to help grizzly bears?" Plans and reports alone won't help the bears. Since grizzlies were first recommended for designation as "threatened" in 2002, not a single hectare of grizzly habitat has been protected. Nowhere have road densities been reduced, as recommended in the recovery plan.

We could say that the time for talk is finished; now it is time for action. In fact, the time for action was six years ago. That makes the need to do something – anything! – to protect grizzly bear habitat more urgent than ever.

