



ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION
"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

October 3, 2008

Dear Premier Stelmach

Re: Grizzly Bear Recovery process

Recent developments in Alberta's grizzly bear management have been alarming, and it seems that there is an urgent need for you to take a more direct interest in this issue, as the actions of your staff seem to be taking your government further and further from the expressed wishes of Albertans.

In 2002, government scientists believed there to be around 1000 grizzlies in Alberta. This number was low enough for them to recommend designation of the grizzly as a "threatened" species. With the recent release of the data for Year 4 of a 5-Year population study, it now seems that the population is closer to 350-400 bears. This should be a cause for considerable concern, but seems to be resulting in minimal action. Indeed recent comments in the Edmonton Journal (*Tories downgrade grizzly plan*, October 3, 2008) from George Hamilton, a priority species manager with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, suggest that the Alberta government has now decided, after 6 years of a protracted recovery process, that it is not going to try to recover grizzly bears at all. Instead they will be aiming to maintain them at their current endangered level.

The fact that the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) appears to have unilaterally decided that it does not want to recover grizzly bears flies in the face of all previous commitments by the Alberta government. It makes a mockery of the multi-stakeholder Grizzly Bear Recovery Team (which included representatives from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and the Forest Products Association) which invested more than two years in putting together a recovery plan to guide grizzly recovery in the province.

The provincial Recovery Plan built upon the lessons learned from the successful grizzly recovery process in the USA's Yellowstone ecosystem; from an estimated population of 136 individuals when the grizzly was listed as "threatened" in 1975, the population is now believed to be more than 600 animals. Two main factors underpinned this successful recovery. One was a legal recognition of grizzlies as an endangered species (despite the 2002 recommendation by its own scientists, the Alberta government has still not done this).

The second and most important factor was the recognition that grizzlies need secure habitat, safe from motorized access. Roads mean dead grizzly bears. Core grizzly bear habitat was identified, and firm road density targets were set at 0.6 kilometres of road per square kilometre. These targets were



ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION
"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

adhered to, and it worked. Alberta's Recovery Plan drew on these experiences to recommend the same thing in Alberta.

But at the same time as unilaterally deciding not to recover grizzlies in the province, SRD appears also to have produced its own bizarre parody of the successful Yellowstone program, and is now calling for a program that will restrict access for four-by-four trucks, but do nothing to limit activity by ATVs and motorbikes. This is a ludicrous decision, which has no scientific justification of any sort, and will likely do nothing to benefit grizzly bears.

SRD's decision also conflicts notably with the expressed views of Albertans. In a Herald poll in October 2007, 86.3% of respondents agreed that "all-terrain vehicles should be restricted in the eastern slopes to protect Alberta's grizzlies." And in the 2007 results from the public Land-Use Framework survey, 71.5% of participants would be "willing to accept limits to Energy Development to provide for more Habitat Protection." SRD's actions can only create considerable hostility to your government.

A number of actions are needed as soon as possible:

- It is vital that your government declares the grizzly a "threatened" species in Alberta as soon as possible, and indeed the latest population numbers suggest that the Endangered Species Conservation Committee should now re-assess the grizzly with a view to down-grading its status to "endangered."
- The suspended multi-stakeholder Grizzly Bear Recovery Team must be re-instated and allowed to continue its job.
- Funding must be provided for the grizzly recovery process.
- A program to limit motorized access into grizzly bear habitat must be initiated immediately. Evidence from the successful grizzly recovery program in the US indicates that this is the only thing that will work.

Yours truly
ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

Nigel Douglas,
Conservation Specialist,