

We could memorialize the creatures and landscapes that slipped from our grasp. The last grizzly in California died in 1922, yet an image of the bear is still prominent on the state flag. This mute testimony to inaction, inability and intransigence is ironic for a state that is so often now in the vanguard of environmental change.

We could satisfy ourselves with the leavings. Most of the rest of the civilized, developed world contents itself with the fragments, dregs and second bests when it comes to spaces and species. They likely have developed a philosophy like one of my university friends. When confronted with failing grades he pointed out that it was not his poor grades that were at fault, it was the impossibly high standards of the school. If we cannot make the grade for species and space

maintenance, we can always lower the standard.

### We Can Learn, Can't We?

If we continue to lose spaces and species knowingly in the face of alternatives, then we will have committed an unforgivable, unpardonable act of complacency. There is an old bit of doggerel that goes; "when home and land are gone and spent, then the learning is most excellent." We need to share the same spaces as grizzlies, caribou, and bull trout, not because we live there but because the quality of their spaces contributes to the quality of where we live.

The theologians sitting long days and into the night debating how many angels could dance on the head of a pin never existed. The debate is a myth we have come to believe because we hear it

repeatedly and never check the sources of the story. It is akin of the myths of sustainable development, corporate stewardship and accountable government.

We need to spend our days in positive discussion about the real things of this world. Watershed values, storing carbon, preserving possibilities, setting benchmarks and, retaining places rich in biodiversity where we can find joy, surprise and humility – they are of greater importance, arguably, than some of our current resource extraction endeavours.

Others have learned the lesson; let's not be blind to the possibilities of change while there are good options staring us in the face. A seemingly altruistic act of saving imperiled spaces and species may be viewed soon as a perfectly reasonable, selfish act to save ourselves.

You see, we also are up there, dancing the Macarena on that pinhead. 🐻



## ALBERTA'S GRIZZLIES: WHO WILL BEAR THE BLAME?

By Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist

Who will history point to as the person most responsible for the demise of Alberta's grizzly bears? *Demise* is surely not too strong a word for a species whose population estimates have slid from 1000 in 2002 to 350-400 today. In all that time successive governments have stood by and done nothing to address the destruction of grizzly habitat, choosing instead to focus on ways to spin their desperate mismanagement into a good news story.

The government's own Endangered Species Conservation Committee (ESCC) recommended in 2002 that the grizzly should be designated as *threatened*. Subsequent government responses have been consistently bizarre, from previous Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) Minister Mike Cardinal, who set up the provincial Recovery Team while continuing to issue licences to hunt grizzlies, to current Minister Ted Morton, whose department has talked about managing motorized access, but only by redefining the term *motorized vehicle* so as not to include ATVs.



*The prospect of an Alberta without the iconic grizzly bear is frightening. The bear's future is inextricably linked to insuring the species has sufficient habitat.* PHOTO: © W. LYNCH

The Alberta government continues to back away from its commitments to grizzly bear recovery. The word *recovery* is seldom used these days in government circles, having been dropped in favour of the safer word *management*. More emphasis is also being put on the fact that Alberta's grizzlies are not a distinct population; they are part of a much larger western Canadian population. The logical extension of this argument is of course that it doesn't matter if Alberta loses its grizzly bears; there are plenty more in B.C.

Quite incredibly, the Alberta government has still not ruled out the possibility of reintroducing the grizzly bear hunt after the temporary hunt suspension runs out in 2009. Having spent 5 years and \$2 million on a detailed scientific survey of grizzly numbers, Minister Morton recently announced that his department will also take into account the results of a poll supported by the Alberta Fish and Game Association which concluded that, because there were lots of people who had seen grizzly bears, there must be lots of bears and so hunting should be restored.

As the person responsible for managing wildlife in Alberta, the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development stands squarely in the crosshairs as the person responsible for managing public lands and wildlife populations.

Of course, the Minister for SRD does not operate in a vacuum. Other ministries, most notably Energy, also make decisions that affect grizzly bears and other wildlife. Energy sells mineral leases throughout grizzly habitat with little input from wildlife managers and none from the Alberta public. The Minister of SRD operates according to the mandate given to him by the Premier. Although this mandate does not mention wildlife, biodiversity or the environment, it does require the ministry to “Ensure Alberta’s energy resources are developed in an environmentally sustainable way.”

And, of course, all of these politicians operate according to the mandate given to them by us, the people of Alberta. Albertans care deeply about their grizzly bears. (At least we seem to care deeply right up until election day, when we



*Although cutblocks create good habitat for grizzly bears that benefit is outweighed by the increased mortality risk resulting from road construction. PHOTO: R. TETREAULT*

care about other issues more). It was those people who cared enough to write letters to newspapers and contact their MLAs who helped to get the grizzly hunt suspended in 2006. Hopefully it will

be those same people, and many more beside, who will force their government to listen and to act to reverse the demise of the province’s grizzly bear population before it is too late. 🐻

SRD Minister	Grizzly Friend	Grizzly Foe
Mike Cardinal, 2001-2004	Received 2002 recommendation from Endangered Species Conservation Committee to list grizzly as <i>threatened</i> Established Grizzly Recovery Team	Refused to list grizzly as <i>threatened</i> Continued to issue licences to hunt grizzlies Did not save any grizzly habitat Grizzly bear population estimates fall from 1,000 <sup>1</sup> to “less than 700 <sup>2</sup> ”
David Couatts, 2004-2007	Suspended grizzly hunt Initiated 5-year population survey	Refused to list grizzly as <i>threatened</i> Did not save any grizzly habitat Grizzly bear population estimates fall from “less than 700” to less than 500 <sup>3</sup>
Ted Morton, 2007-present	Approved Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan Continued temporary suspension of grizzly hunt.	Refused to list grizzly as <i>threatened</i> Disbanded provincial Recovery Team Did not save any grizzly habitat Cancelled population survey before it was complete Grizzly bear population estimates fall from less than 500 to around 350

*Grizzly bear management records of successive Ministers of Sustainable Resource Development*

Notes

1. February 2002, Endangered Species Conservation Committee
2. Draft Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan
3. From Government of Alberta DNA population estimates, 2004-2007  
<http://www.srd.gov.ab.ca/fishwildlife/wildlifeinalberta/grizzlybearmanagement/default.aspx>