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Alberta government urged to stand fast on grizzly hunt suspension

Alberta environmentalists are hoping that the Alberta government will resist concerted lobbying efforts to introduce a spring grizzly bear hunt. Rather the government should heed the advice of its own scientists, who have consistently emphasized that such a hunt would not be sustainable.

Government scientists first called for a halt to the hunt in 2002, when the province's grizzly population was believed to be around 1,000 bears. Then the Endangered Species Conservation Committee called for the grizzly bear to be designated as a *threatened* species. With the most recent DNA-based research suggesting that the population is less than 500 bears, the hunt makes even less sense than ever before; yet, incredibly, some hunters continue to call for a new hunt of Alberta's imperiled grizzlies.

"Traditionally, hunters advocate a reasonable harvest of sustainably managed wildlife populations," says Nigel Douglas, Alberta Wilderness Association conservation specialist. "But this has nothing to do with that. This is about people who want to kill bears, whether it is sustainable or not."

Some hunters cite encounters between humans and grizzlies as a reason why they should be allowed to kill bears. But the province's own Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan, released in March 2008, makes it clear that it is increasing human access into previously remote grizzly bear habitat which is the driving force for the grizzly's troubles. All grizzly bears need is secure undisturbed habitat where they can go about their business of being bears.

"Just because human-bear encounters are increasing does not mean there are more bears," says Sarah Elmeligi of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Southern Alberta Chapter. "Increased encounters are more likely a reflection of increased access for people into bear habitat, and evidence of decreasing intact habitats for bears to successfully live and reproduce."

"Despite the fact that there is not a shred of scientific evidence to support their claims, there are those who argue that bears should be hunted to keep them *wary* of people," says Douglas. "The idea of hunting bears to keep them wary is laughable; hunting bears doesn't make them wary, it makes them dead."

Continuing the suspension of the hunt is the first small and very necessary step in a concerted effort to recover these iconic symbols of Alberta's wilderness. "The Alberta government needs to make it clear that there will be no grizzly bear hunt until grizzly numbers are recovered," says Carl Morrison of Sierra Club Canada. "Protecting the grizzly bear under Alberta's *Wildlife Act*, as recommended by government scientists since 2002, is the rational first step and should not be delayed any longer."

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