



**DEFENDERS
OF
WILDLIFE**

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The Honourable Mel Knight, MLA
Minister of Sustainable Resource Development
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
Main Floor, Great West Life Building
9920 108 Street
Edmonton, AB T5K 2M4

RE: Implementing the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan

Dear Minister Knight,

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. We are encouraged by the Ministry's vision: "Alberta's lands, forests, fish and wildlife benefit both present and future Albertans." And we look forward to partnering with you to help achieve the Ministry's conservation goals.

As you might imagine, the members of our groups join with other Albertans to encourage you to fully **implement the Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan** of 2008. We very much appreciate the suspension of the annual grizzly bear hunt, the beginnings of BearSmart programs, and other projects initiated in pursuit of recovering the Province's grizzly bear population. But we are concerned that much remains to be done, and each day of delay further imperils Alberta's grizzlies. If these delays continue, the Ministry may not be able to accomplish its goal "to ensure grizzly bears survive and thrive on Alberta's landscapes."

We are concerned in particular that nothing has been done to **protect core grizzly bear habitat** or address **access management** as required by the Recovery Plan. The Ministry's business plan (2010-13) promises "leading practices to sustain biodiversity (including grizzly bear and caribou), habitat conservation, and stewardship in ... recovery planning processes." We participated in the stakeholder working group convened by then Minister Morton to address access management and forwarded a long list of recommendations to the Ministry in October of 2008. To date, nothing has come of our recommendations. How will this commitment to sustain grizzly bears as a component of the Province's biodiversity translate into real habitat protection in 2010?

Our groups are in a position to inform our members, the media and others regarding the importance of respecting grizzly habitat. We look forward to partnering with your Ministry in this critical effort.

It is disappointing that the 2010-11 **budget** has little to say about grizzly bear recovery. We notice specific reference to “Bear Response Teams” and hope these teams will be part of the Province’s larger community-based BearSmart effort. But the “Wildlife Management” line item budget has fallen from \$13,410,000 in 2008-09 to just \$8,557,000 in the current budget – a drop of 36 percent. How much of this budget is dedicated to grizzly bear recovery. How will these funds be spent? Do you think the amount is sufficient?

Our members are pleased that the independent status review has been completed and soon will be discussed by the Endangered Species Conservation Committee. Research conducted by the Foothills Research Institute has found fewer grizzlies than were assumed to exist last time the Committee considered the status of grizzlies, and more roads and activities have penetrated grizzly habitat. In light of these unfortunate developments, we expect that the Committee—and subsequently, your Ministry—will find a **“threatened” or “endangered” designation** appropriate.

We understand that there is some confusion regarding the overlapping roles of the Foothills Research Institute and the scientific advisory team established by Mr. Morton. But neither of these entities fulfills the mandate of the Recovery Plan for an ongoing **Grizzly Bear Recovery Team**. We hope you will reinstate a science-based Recovery Team as required by the approved Recovery Plan (on pages 9, 39 and 47).

It is clear from established and fledging efforts that **BearSmart** community programs can meet a number of worthy goals. This road was paved in the Bow Valley, with other communities—including Crowsnest Pass and Bragg Creek—following suit. We appreciate the materials produced and distributed by your Ministry and aimed at landowners, recreationists, ranchers, workers and others operating in bear country. We are convinced that BearSmart dollars are a very good investment, and we hope the Province will increase funds for public safety and bear conservation.

As our organizations and members are based in communities in and adjacent to grizzly bear range, we have been a major force in initiating, managing and funding BearSmart programs in Alberta. Once again, we have an excellent opportunity to partner with your Ministry and our neighbours and communities to ensure the success of BearSmart programs.

We realize there are many demands on your desk, particularly in the first few months of your tenure. But nearly eight years ago, the Alberta Endangered Species Conservation Committee recommended protecting the Province’s grizzly bear population as “threatened.” The *Edmonton Journal*, *Calgary Herald* and others have called for faster implementation of the Recovery Plan. We join these voices and Albertans across the province in respectfully urging you and your Ministry to move now to fully implement the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan.

March promises to be a very busy month for grizzly bear management and recovery. The Endangered Species Conservation Committee will be considering an updated status review. Grizzlies will be emerging from their dens. The South Saskatchewan RAC will reconvene. And we hope you are considering extending the hunt suspension. In light of these events, **we hope to be able to meet with you to discuss grizzly bear recovery at your earliest convenience**. We look forward to a productive discussion.

Albertans look to our provincial government for leadership, timely and accurate information, and funding appropriate to provincial responsibilities. They look to us and other non-government entities for collaboration, assistance and respectful critique of wildlife policy and on-the-ground management. We are eager to partner with your Ministry in the recovery of Alberta's grizzly bear population. And to offer our expertise and analysis as needed.

We sincerely look forward to meeting with you soon and to assisting and supporting you in this critical wildlife recovery effort.

Best regards,

Jim Pissot, MSc, Canada Field Representative, Defenders of Wildlife

Fully endorsed by the following organizations and individuals:

Carolyn Aspeslet, Executive Director, Castle-Crown Wilderness Committee
Nigel Douglas, Conservation Specialist, Alberta Wilderness Association
Sarah Elmelegi, Senior Conservation Planner, CPAWS-Southern Alberta Chapter
Wendy Francis, LL.M., Director, Conservation Science and Action, Yellowstone to Yukon
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Jeff Gailus, MSc, Writer
Marilyn Liddell, Secretary, Crowsnest Conservation Society
Mike McIvor, President, Bow Valley Naturalists
Carl Morrison, Action Grizzly Bear Campaigner, Sierra Club Canada
Rocky Notnes, President, Athabasca Bioregional Society
Phillip Penner, Executive Director, Nature Alberta / Federation of Alberta Naturalists
Jill Seaton, Conservation Chair, Jasper Environmental Association
Kevin Strange, Senior Advisor-Conservation, Calgary Zoo
Valerie Strong, Conservation Coordinator, WildCanada Conservation Alliance
Katherine Thompson, Executive Director, CPAWS-Northern Alberta Chapter