



ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

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Letter to the Editor:

Alberta Government Can't Afford to Protect Grizzly Bears

Recent comments from Alberta Sustainable Resource Development Minister, Mel Knight, on CBC National Television News suggest that the provincial government cannot afford to protect grizzly bears in the province.

Minister Knight's comments came in response to suggestions that the \$150,000 Alberta spends annually on education programs to reduce conflicts between humans and bears compares unfavourably with the \$4.5 million the province of Ontario spends on similar programs. Minister Knight commented on "the pressure of investing more provincial money in to the protection of grizzly bears," and admitted that he'd "welcome any additional funds from conservation groups willing to contribute."

That it should come to this! A province that would happily spend \$2 million to run a train between Whistler and Vancouver during the Olympic Games (including more than \$200,000 to distribute free iPods to guests on the train), yet can't afford to spend money to recover its most iconic wildlife species.

The Alberta government has known for many years that its grizzly bears are in a perilous state. The new official count of 691 bears is way below the 1,000 which were believed to be in the province when government scientists first recommended back in 2002 that grizzlies should be designated a threatened species. The government knows what the problem is: its 2008 Grizzly Recovery Plan states that "human use of access (specifically, motorized vehicle routes) is one of the primary threats to grizzly bear persistence." And it knows what to do to fix it: the province's latest grizzly status report states: "To reduce mortality, motorized access to bear habitat must be minimized and human activities that lead to conflicts with bears must be mitigated."

What is ironic is that it would not even cost the cash-strapped Alberta government a huge amount of money to implement its own grizzly recovery plan. More than anything, there is a need for organized regulations which begin today to reduce the huge network of industrial roads still being pushed into grizzly habitat. Many of the industry associations agree that motorized access into grizzly habitat should be reduced with little impact to their activities.

But for the time being it looks like Alberta's grizzlies will be reduced to pan-handling for scraps; an afterthought for when the last of the iPods have been given away.

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