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Recall of Grizzly Recovery Team: Cause for Optimism or Just More Hot Air?

A temporary recall of Alberta's Grizzly Bear Recovery Team could be the long-awaited first step on the road to recovery for the province's beleaguered grizzlies, or could alternatively be nothing more than a public relations exercise. The Recovery Team, summarily dismissed in April 2008, has been invited by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to a meeting on Monday April 26, and grizzly supporters across the province will be paying close attention.

"We would love to believe that this meeting is a sign of a renewed commitment by the Alberta government to finally begin implementing its own grizzly recovery plan," says Nigel Douglas, conservation specialist with Alberta Wilderness Association. "The time is long overdue for the government to fulfill the requirements of the recovery plan," he adds.

In April 2008, shortly after the publication of the *Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan*, the Recovery Team was disbanded. The Team's spokesman, University of Calgary Biologist Robert Barclay, told the Calgary Herald at the time "The statement that our recovery team's work is complete was a surprise to me."

"The Recovery Plan itself is clear that the team's role did not end with the publication of the plan," says Wendy Francis, Director of Conservation, Science and Action for the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative "The Team was supposed to be "responsible for updating the Plan, and evaluating and reporting on the progress of recovery actions'."

The multi-stakeholder Grizzly Bear Recovery Team – which included representatives from the government, science, industry, hunting and environmental sectors – was originally appointed in 2002, after the provincial Endangered Species Conservation Committee first recommended the grizzly bear be declared a *threatened* species (though that recommendation has still not been adopted to this day).

"The Recovery Team was charged with monitoring and reviewing the success of the plan's implementation and they need to be engaged to do that," emphasizes Sarah Elmeligi, Senior Conservation Planner for the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society – Southern Alberta chapter. "Essentially, their engagement ensures that tax payer dollars spent on grizzly bear recovery are being used effectively and having the desired impact." Carl Morrison of Sierra Club Canada adds "The grizzly bear Scientific Advisory Committee, formed after the Recovery Team was disbanded, is in no way a substitute for the critical role of the Recovery Team."

"For grizzly recovery, the proof of the pudding is in the eating," says Jim Pissot with the WildCanada Conservation Alliance. "A plan will only recover grizzlies if it is implemented. It has been clear for many years that what grizzlies need is core habitat protected from motorized access, but still there has been zero progress in that direction."

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