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Despite “Threatened” Listing, Alberta Grizzly Deaths Remain Too High

Even though grizzly bears were listed as *threatened* last June, grizzly bear mortality in Alberta reached unsustainable levels in 2010. An estimated 29 grizzlies died in Alberta, approximately 4.2 percent of the population. This level of mortality is much higher than the 2.8 percent mortality rate suggested as “sustainable” in the Alberta government’s own 2010 report, *Status of the Alberta Grizzly Bear in Alberta*.

“The threatened listing is meaningless if serious measures are not introduced to reduce grizzly bear mortality,” says Nigel Douglas, Alberta Wilderness Association conservation specialist. “The single greatest benefit would come from reducing motorized access into grizzly bear habitat.”

Twenty-one grizzly deaths were recorded in 2010, of which 17 were known to be human-caused. A large number of grizzly deaths go unreported every year; to give a fuller estimate of *total* mortality, Alberta government scientists add **40 percent** to the number of *recorded* mortalities (*Status of the Alberta Grizzly Bear in Alberta, Update 2010*). This adds up to an estimate of **29 grizzly deaths** in Alberta in 2010, or 4.2 percent of the population.

The most recent estimates of Alberta’s grizzly population (March 2010) is “691 grizzly bears in lands under provincial jurisdiction plus Waterton Lakes National Park and portions of Banff and Jasper national parks” (*Status of the Alberta Grizzly Bear in Alberta, Update 2010*).

“After nine years of Alberta’s grizzly recovery process, the province has dealt with the low-hanging fruit,” says Sarah Elmeligi, Senior Conservation Planner for the Southern Alberta Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society “The hunt has been temporarily suspended, and the grizzly has been listed as *threatened*. Now it is time to start addressing the problem that will actually result in recovery for grizzly bears on the ground: too much human access in grizzly bear habitat.”

According to the provincial status report, “A large area of grizzly bear habitat, particularly south of Highway 16, currently appears to be a population sink, but could support a self-sustaining population if human-caused mortality was reduced. *To reduce mortality, motorized access to bear habitat must be minimized* and human activities that lead to conflicts with bears must be mitigated” (emphasis added).

“The Alberta government is fully aware of what needs to be done,” points out Wendy Francis, Program Director of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative. “The grizzly status report makes it clear that ‘To reduce mortality, motorized access to bear habitat must be minimized’,” she says. “Reducing road densities and managing motorized access in Alberta’s foothills must be the focus of government action, and the continuing high levels of grizzly deaths make it more urgent than ever.”

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