

mortality, largely due to access into grizzly habitat. In fact, it is estimated that 90 percent of grizzly deaths occur within 500 metres of a road. Upon its release in March 2008, the provincial *Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan* made it clear that “human use of access (specifically, motorized vehicle routes) is one of the primary threats to grizzly bear persistence.” It then went on to prescribe that road density in core grizzly habitat should not exceed 0.6 km/km²; density should not exceed 1.2 km/km² in all other grizzly range. Along with this key recommendation, the Recovery Plan also outlined a suite of other strategies to mitigate the effects of linear disturbance upon grizzlies. Some of those strategies are: coordinated, inter-departmental road planning before new road construction, deactivation of roads not regularly used within two months of last use, reclamation of roads no longer in use within one year of last use, and ensuring off-highway vehicle activity is managed and restricted to designated routes and areas. The Recovery Plan recommended putting these management actions into operation within a year of its release. Their implementation, inexcusably, is more than three years overdue.

Within the last year, two separate studies conducted by non-profit organizations within southern Alberta have revealed linear access densities within grizzly habitat already greatly exceed the thresholds recommended in the Recovery Plan. A study conducted by Global Forest Watch Canada showed that the density of linear disturbances in the Castle Area Forest Land Use Zone, identified as core grizzly habitat, is 1.3 km/km². This is more than double the threshold recommended in the recovery plan; in some watersheds densities were more than triple the recommended threshold. Another report commissioned by the Ghost Watershed Alliance assessed cumulative impacts in a study area within the Ghost River Watershed. The study included determining actual access density. Although the study area is considered non-core grizzly habitat, it was found that the average actual access density was 5 km/km². This greatly exceeds the threshold of 1.2 km/km² recommended for all grizzly range.

It must also be emphasized that the provincial Recovery Plan defines “open routes” as “a route without restrictions

Moratorium on Motorized Access Necessary for Grizzly Survival

AWA and several other Alberta conservation groups have called for an immediate moratorium on all new road and trail construction within grizzly habitat. Why? Because Alberta continues to refuse to take meaningful measures to recover declining grizzly bear populations in Alberta, we have little choice.

Since the grizzly bear was designated as *Threatened* in 2010 little has been done to secure grizzly habitat. It is well established that the single greatest threat to grizzly bear survival is human-caused

on motorized vehicle use.” Such access restrictions may include temporary, seasonal, or permanent closures, or restrictions to only authorized use. This implies that any access route open to public use is considered an open route. When calculating appropriate access densities, all trails, seismic lines, pipelines and any other route accessible to people and off-highway vehicles should be included.

The provincial grizzly recovery plan now has been in place for over three years. During this time, the only identifiable, concrete action that has been taken is a moratorium on the grizzly hunt (renewed annually so far). In a letter to Alberta Sustainable Resource Development Minister Mel Knight, we have asked for an immediate halt to all approvals that create new access (roads, trails, pipelines, seismic lines, clear cuts, etc.) until:

1. linear access densities for all core grizzly habitat within Alberta’s grizzly bear population units are calculated accurately,
2. actions have been taken to remove and effectively close access such that the effective linear access densities are at or below 0.6 km/km² within the designated “core” portion of each grizzly bear population unit and below 1.2 km/km² within remaining grizzly bear range, and
3. a comprehensive plan is in place to designate motorized trails and manage and enforce motorized access throughout grizzly bear range in the province.

When a problem arises, such as the threat of grizzly bear extirpation in Alberta, it is not often that the solution is known. It is even less often that the solution to that problem is written in a provincially mandated Recovery Plan, broadly accepted by scientists, conservation groups, and industry representatives. The increasing maze of roads, trails, cut lines, pipelines, and other such linear disturbances that currently slice across Alberta’s remaining provincial wilderness areas is affecting more than just grizzly bears. The rampant spread of industrial access into all corners of the province has amplified the decline of many species threatened in the province, impacted our watersheds, and

fragmented many of our most sensitive ecosystems. Until the cumulative impacts of such proliferation have been accurately quantified and the disconnect between what the public wants, what the science says, and what actions the Alberta government does (or does not) take is corrected, a moratorium on road construction in grizzly bear habitat is needed to protect Alberta wildlife and the wilderness upon which their survival depends.

- Madeline Wilson