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High number of grizzly bear removals threatens population recovery

The Alberta government's new report on 2011 grizzly bear recovery reveals a disturbing trend that is harmful to the province's *Threatened* grizzlies. Large numbers of bears are being trapped and moved by provincial wildlife staff. In 2011, 24 bears were trapped and moved, 15 of those to locations outside their home territories. Thirteen grizzlies were trapped and relocated in 2010, and 16 were relocated in 2009. Bears are moved for a variety of reasons, but usually in response to perceived threats to human safety or damage to property. While removal can improve human safety and protect property in the short-term, long-term research shows that translocated bears generally die prematurely. In one study, 38% of relocated grizzlies died within two years.

"Trapping bears and moving them does not address the root of the problem and prevent human-bear conflicts over the long-term," says Sarah Elmeligi of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. "Only a comprehensive government-funded program to help all landowners permanently reduce attractants will create lasting solutions that both protect bears and ensure human safety," she adds.

"If there is an easy food source available, bears will find it," says Wendy Francis of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative. "Ranchers, bee-keepers and others whose activities create food sources (such as cattle carcasses, grain bins, fruit trees, and bee hives), need assistance to properly manage attractants and dissuade bears from coming on to their land in the first place," she adds.

In 2011, nine bears out of an estimated population of 90 (or more than 10% of the population) were moved out of the Livingstone Bear Management Area (on top of the six bears which died in the area). When a bear is moved to outside of its home territory, it is a permanent loss to that population, as if it had died. Alberta's *Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan* suggests that 2.8% is a sustainable annual loss for a population of grizzlies; these relocations combined with grizzly bear deaths put several of Alberta's grizzly bear population units well above this threshold, meaning their numbers will continue to decline, rather than recover.

The 2011 report outlines how the province is implementing some small-scale actions to reduce foods attractive to bears. Examples of this are the dead livestock storage bins, electric fencing and bear proof grain bins being deployed in southern Alberta. However, much of this depends on the voluntary actions of landowners and non-profit groups and it is not sufficient in comparison to the magnitude of the problem.

"These numbers tell us that there is a serious problem and it's not being addressed adequately," says Nigel Douglas, of the Alberta Wilderness Association. "The Alberta government needs to properly fund its own recovery plan and bring in a comprehensive program to reduce attractants throughout grizzly bear range," he adds.

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