

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 4, 2013

TOO MUCH BACKCOUNTRY ACCESS BRINGS DEATH TO 15 MORE GRIZZLIES IN 2012

Calgary, AB – Latest numbers from the provincial government show that 15 more grizzlies died in Alberta last year, bringing to 195 the total number killed in the last decade (or almost 28 percent of the known population). This is far, far too many in a province where the latest official numbers show only 700 total bears province-wide (well below internationally-recognized thresholds for sustainable populations). The majority of grizzly deaths last year were likely due to the proliferation of roads, trails, pipelines and other forms of backcountry access. Province-wide the level of access to grizzlies' backcountry habitat significantly exceeds the maximums established in the government's [2008 Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan](#).

"The Grizzly Bear Recovery plan identifies trail networks that facilitate motorized backcountry access as one of the most significant causes of grizzly deaths," notes Katie Morrison, Conservation Director for the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society's Southern Alberta Chapter. "Although the plan calls for a reduction in access and Alberta's wildlife conservation organizations have been for years calling on the government to reduce access, if anything the amount of motorized access is increasing. And grizzly bears are paying the price," she adds.

Of the 15 known grizzly bears killed in Alberta in 2012, 14 were attributable to human causes. While four were accidental deaths (for example on Alberta's highways) nine occurred because of conflicts between bears and people, likely in backcountry settings (e.g., mistaking a black-bear for a grizzly, illegal kills, and self-defence.) It's not possible to say with certainty how many deaths occurred because of backcountry access because the province does not publish the location of grizzly deaths.

The Government of Alberta's 2008 Recovery Plan emphasizes that "human use of access (specifically, motorized vehicle routes) is one of the primary threats to grizzly bear persistence." The plan goes on to recommend that the amount of access (roads, railroads, trails, pipelines, cut lines and so forth) not exceed 0.6km of access for every square kilometer in core grizzly habitat. Despite the plan, which has been officially adopted by Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (AESRD), those numbers commonly are exceeded. Linear access levels in some areas are many times what the plan recommends. This is the case in the Castle, as well as in the Little Smoky, where grizzlies have the lowest rates of reproduction and are most in danger

"The grizzly is not just a *threatened* species," says AWA Conservation Specialist Sean Nichols, "but an iconic *threatened* species. The grizzly is recognized worldwide, and worldwide they are looking at Alberta and seeing how our mismanagement of the backcountry is making it challenging for bear numbers to recover."

This summer will see the release of a draft South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, under AESRD's Land Use Framework (LUF) process. Regional plans are overarching policy that guide the management of the province's public lands.

"We've been told several times that access density and management will be addressed in the South Saskatchewan Plan," says Nichols. "Our groups will be watching very carefully to see if the plan contains specific mechanisms to establish and enforce proper limits so that grizzlies can roam in safety," he adds.

For more information:

Sean Nichols – AWA: 403-283-2025

Katie Morrison – CPAWS SAB: 403-202-6307