

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 26, 2013

Federal Government Considers Extra Protection for Grizzlies

Conservation Groups Point out Benefits of Proposed Protection

Calgary, AB – The federal government is considering an extra layer of legal protection for the country's grizzly bears, a move supported by three Alberta-based conservation groups.

In 2012, Canada's Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife (COSEWIC) recommended, for the second time in a decade, that Canada's grizzly population be designated as "Species of Special Concern" under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). Canadians have the opportunity to comment on this proposal until October 4th, 2013.

"Many populations of grizzly bears are small and isolated, especially in southern Alberta and British Columbia, and parts of the Yukon," says Wendy Francis, of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y). "However, even where grizzlies are more numerous, such as northern BC, threats to their long-term survival are growing. Oil and gas development, in particular, and the proliferation of roads that it brings, is rapidly spreading throughout grizzly bear habitat in northern Canada."

At one time, grizzlies were among the dominant predators on the continent. Their range extended from the shores of Hudson's Bay in the east to Mexico in the south, and west to the Pacific Ocean. Now grizzly bears have been eliminated from most of their range in the lower 48 states and have been pushed west almost to the Alberta/BC border in Canada. The incursion of motorized access and human-related food sources into their habitat threatens Canada's remaining grizzly populations.

A designation of Special Concern would provide little additional protection (i.e., there is no habitat protection or prohibition against killing). However, it could help improve the management of the bears' habitat, which would improve their chances of survival.

"As a Species of Special Concern, grizzlies would be entitled to a comprehensive management plan that is coordinated among federal, provincial and territorial wildlife management agencies," notes Sean Nichols, of the Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA). "A Special Concern listing also would help to raise the profile of the threats against grizzly bears, perhaps increasing the public interest in and demand for greater protection of their habitat."

Federal Environment Minister Leona Aglukkaq will make the final decision whether or not to give the grizzlies a Special Concern listing. In doing so, she must take into account comments received from the public. Comments can be submitted at the SARA Registry web site: <http://bit.ly/1bEls5f>.

"We encourage all people concerned about the future of Canada's grizzlies to submit a comment supporting their listing as a Species of Special Concern," says Katie Morrison, of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Southern Alberta Chapter (CPAWS). "And we call on the federal, provincial and territorial governments to work quickly to develop a management plan to protect their habitat."

For more information:

Wendy Francis, Y2Y: 403.763.8633

Sean Nichols, AWA: 403.283.2025

Katie Morrison, CPAWS: 403.232.6686