

February 1, 2005

Limited grizzly bear hunt set for 2005

Management actions are working

Edmonton... Following a review of last year's grizzly bear hunt and other data, the Alberta government has decided that the same conservative approach will be in place for this year's hunt. The hunt limitations are:

- 73 grizzly hunting licences will be issued, a reduction of 44 per cent since 2002;
- last year's shortened season will be continued in most areas; and
- the season will remain closed south of Hwy 1 and in the Willmore area.

Hunting licences will be issued through a random draw. The licences will be in effect from April 1 to May 15 (May 31 in the far north). They are limited to Alberta residents.

In 2004, 73 licences were available, and six grizzly bears were taken during the hunt. Throughout the year, four grizzly bears died from all other causes (e.g., self-defence, problem wildlife), bringing the total for the year to 10 bears, which is down from the previous five-year average of over 35 bears a year. It was the lowest overall mortality rate for grizzly bears recorded in Alberta in the past 32 years. However, the number of human encounters with grizzly bears has remained high.

The Alberta government's approach to the grizzly bear hunt makes conservation the top priority. Grizzly bear management includes more than a well-regulated hunt. It includes problem wildlife management, backcountry programs, research and effective legislation. For example, a grizzly bear inventory was started in 2004, based on DNA census techniques to more accurately estimate bear populations. As well, under current legislation there is a maximum \$100,000 fine for poaching grizzly bears and orders to clean-up campsites and yards can be enforced, helping improve human and bear safety.

Those interested in applying for a licence can do so at authorized licence vendors throughout the province from February 7 to March 3.

More information on Alberta's grizzly bear management is available in the attached backgrounder (map of grizzly bear management areas are also attached).

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Backgrounder

Wildlife Amendment Act

Legislation introduced through the *Wildlife Amendment Act* in fall 2003 established a maximum \$100,000 fine for poaching grizzly bears and introduced steps to improve public and bear safety through enforceable clean-up orders. No poaching incidents have been reported since this amendment on fines came into effect. The legislation gave Alberta the authority to issue clean-up orders for situations where people leave out food or garbage that might attract wildlife. Such clean-up orders help protect bears-as well as deer, elk and other species that can come into conflict with humans.

To help protect both people and bears, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development distributes numerous information bulletins to educate people about steps they should take to ensure their safety in bear country.

Increasing On-the-Ground Activities

Ongoing and increasing efforts to reduce bear-human conflicts include:

Bear Response Teams

- Specially trained fish and wildlife officers with Sustainable Resource Development respond to problem grizzly and black bear cases through the Bear Response Team program, established in 1985.
- A Bear Response Team handles all problems with grizzly bears where control action is deemed necessary where a bear has come into contact with humans.
- The team primarily deals with property damage and bear maulings. Property damage includes livestock killed by bears.
- There are 14 team leaders, including one who is a Karelian bear dog handler. For each incident, team leaders activate a team of fish and wildlife officers to assist with a control action.

Signage and Trail Closures

- Officers with Sustainable Resource Development and Alberta Community Development post warning signs and close public hiking trails if there are public safety concerns about problem bears.

Aversive Conditioning

- Sustainable Resource Development and Community Development officers in southwestern Alberta use aversive conditioning techniques to condition bears to stay away from urban or high public use areas. These techniques include the use of "scare cracker" shells, bangers, rubber bullets and Karelian bear dogs as negative stimuli.

Fencing dumps and landfills

- Alberta works with municipalities to ensure that garbage dumps are fenced, or that access to landfills is prevented by electric barriers-to stop bears from using dumps as food sources, e.g., the Swan Hills Landfill site.
- Similarly, the Town of Canmore discontinued curbside garbage pick up to significantly reduce bear problems in the town.

Educating industry and Albertans

- Sustainable Resource Development presents bear awareness programs in communities and works with off-highway vehicle organizations to promote bear awareness and responsible use of trails, e.g., the Respect the Land Program.
- Alberta encourages industry to incinerate garbage and adopt other safety practices at remote industrial sites to avoid attracting bears to the area.
- [A camp safety brochure](#) has been distributed to many industrial worksites in northern Alberta.

Working with industry on access

- When it comes to industrial development on Crown lands, Sustainable Resource Development reviews plans for proposed developments (e.g., timber harvest, oil wells, access roads, etc.) that may affect important bear habitat, such as dens and prime feeding areas. This is especially important for grizzly habitat.
- If plans for development border on key habitat, whenever possible, the department works with developers to relocate sites (and/or encourage industry to use directional drilling when it comes to oil and gas) and reroute roads.
- The department may also ask for regulated access by developers if an area includes particularly good bear habitat. Regulated access includes things like industry being required to use locking gates in specific areas.

Reclamation

- Industrial access roads are being reclaimed in co-operation with industry.
- Government and industry are also working co-operatively to minimize industrial access.

Carcass redistribution program

- Through the wildlife carcass redistribution program, temporary feeding sites for grizzlies are established in chronic problem areas to prevent conflicts with livestock producers.
- Road killed deer, elk and moose carcasses are collected throughout the winter then air-lifted to strategic sites in the mountains and foothills in the Pincher Creek area.
- Grizzly bears have the carcasses available for an early spring food source.
- About 200 wildlife carcasses are slung and dropped by helicopters each year.
- Fish and Wildlife staff have noted a significant reduction of spring livestock kills since the program began.

- Conflicts between bears and ranchers have lessened and fewer bears are being captured and removed from the area, which is one of the goals of the program.

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