

March 3, 2006

Alberta suspends spring grizzly bear hunt while collecting data

Edmonton... Alberta will suspend the spring grizzly bear hunt while DNA census data is collected throughout the province, which is expected to continue over the next few years.

“While we pursue better grizzly bear population estimates, Alberta will take the most precautionary approach possible with the spring hunt,” said Minister of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development Dave Coumts.

“We are doing more proactive work than ever before on grizzly bears in Alberta. In the coming year, we’ll be putting more resources into public safety and bringing the BearSmart program into communities.,” added Coumts. “Over the last two years alone, this government has contributed an additional \$1.3 million to research and management actions. Our goal always has been – and continues to be – to conserve grizzly bears and a wide range of species on the Alberta landscape.”

At the same time, the Minister has released the data that he has been reviewing: the 2004/2005 DNA census information, the 2005 mortality data, the Draft Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan and the peer reviews of the Draft Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan.

“We called upon two widely-known experts, Dr. Chuck Schwartz and Dr. Christopher Servheen, to provide scientific peer review on the plan that was submitted by our stakeholder-government committee. Both gentlemen were instrumental in successfully enhancing bear populations on the North American landscape in the Yellowstone Park area,” said Coumts. “Alberta is committed to applying the best scientific advice to its decision making processes, and the Recovery Team will be asked to use the information from the scientific peer review to update its recommendations for my final consideration.”

Over the last few years, government has adopted a number of proactive actions as part of its commitment to a precautionary approach to sustainable grizzly bear management, including:

- • Significant reductions in the hunt since 2001, with a short-term suspension starting in 2006;
- • Habitat mapping and DNA census to establish baseline data on population estimates;
- • Education programs for Albertans and industry operating in bear ranges, and legislation to make it illegal to leave bear attractants in the backcountry;
- • Increased on-the-ground bear aversion, vegetation management, emergency response and access management to increase public safety and reduce bear encounters;
- • \$100,000 maximum fines for poaching;

- • Increase funding for enforcement and prevention by Fish and Wildlife Officers;
and
- • Increased monitoring systems and equipment to better analyze all bear mortalities and relocations.

Since April 1 of last year, there have been over 2,500 reported bear occurrences or encounters, 400 of them involving grizzly bears. Fish and Wildlife staff are on-call 24-hours a day through the Report-A-Poacher line (1-800-642-3800) to respond to emergency public safety situations involving wildlife.

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For further background information and copies of the documents that were released today:

www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/fw/bear_management/index.html

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