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Grizzly Bear Hunt Suspended for Another Year in Alberta

The Alberta government's recent decision to suspend the province's grizzly bear hunt for 2010 is good news for the bears. With a current population estimate of 691 bears in Alberta, the species requires legal protection from harm, not deliberate killing, say Alberta's conservation organizations.

"We applaud the Minister for continuing the government's commitment to removing one avoidable cause of grizzly bear deaths," says Nigel Douglas, Alberta Wilderness Association conservation specialist. "It is important that the new minister for Sustainable Resource Development has reaffirmed the commitments of his predecessor."

In 2002, when the population was believed to be around 1,000 bears, the province's Endangered Species Conservation Committee (ESCC) recommended that Alberta's grizzlies should be designated a *threatened* species. While, eight years later, the province still has not given the bears legal protection, the spring grizzly bear hunt was finally suspended in 2006 for three years. Since then, the suspension has been renewed on a year-by-year basis.

"Hunters cannot guarantee that female bears will not be killed," says Jim Pissot of the WildCanada Conservation Alliance. "With fewer than 360 breeding adult grizzlies in the province, Alberta needs to ensure healthy reproduction rates to recover our threatened bear population."

While this is a positive step, it is clear that there is still a long way to go if grizzlies are ever going to be recovered to sustainable numbers in Alberta. The province's own Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan is clear on where the blame truly lies: "human use of access (specifically, motorized vehicle routes) is one of the primary threats to grizzly bear persistence."

"While environmental groups have consistently argued that hunting a threatened species is entirely inappropriate, we have also been clear that the hunt is not the main cause of grizzlies' troubles in Alberta and suspending the hunt in itself does not fix those problems," says Wendy Francis, Director of Conservation, Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative "Protecting grizzly habitat from destruction and fragmentation, and reducing motorized access is the only thing that will allow Alberta to keep its grizzly bears in the long term."

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