

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 25, 2013

TALK OF GRIZZLY HUNT PREMATURE

Calgary, AB – It's too early to be calling for a reinstatement of the grizzly bear hunt in southern Alberta, says a coalition of groups working toward the population's recovery. Government policy sets out the conditions under which a resumption of a hunt may be considered. Those conditions do not yet exist.

In 2006, the annual provincial spring grizzly bear hunt was suspended until population figures could be established. In 2008, a population of fewer than 700 bears on provincial lands was confirmed. Approximately 1,000 breeding pairs are considered sustainable under international standards. Since the provincial population is well below sustainable levels, the hunting prohibition continues. In 2010, the grizzly bear was listed as Threatened under the Alberta *Wildlife Act*.

"We accept that ranchers in southern Alberta are seeing more grizzlies on their lands," says Sean Nichols of the Alberta Wilderness Association. "However, the growing number of sightings could be due to a number of factors, including bears temporarily moving from BC and Montana because of better food supplies or the poor quality of bear habitat on Crown lands, where motorized access is a huge problem", he adds.

The Alberta Government's *Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan* lays out very specific conditions required before the hunt may resume in a particular Bear Management Area. First, an accurate population estimate for the Area needs to be completed, using DNA census, or habitat-based estimates.

"Research currently underway in Southwest Alberta suggests that there may be more bears there than in the past few years," says Katie Morrison with CPAWS Southern Alberta. "However, this science isn't complete, so there is no solid data to confirm that this population is increasing or by how much," she adds.

If that research shows a growing population, then the *Recovery Plan* lays out other measures that must be examined before a hunt can be reinstated. These include estimates of how many bears the landscape can support, bear age and gender information, and details of grizzly bear populations in adjacent jurisdictions. The percentage of bears lost to the population through human-caused deaths or removals and the number of human-conflict incidents are also taken into consideration.

"The whole purpose of Alberta's grizzly bear recovery program is to grow the population," says Wendy Francis of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative. "Rather than immediately reaching for their rifles, we'd prefer that ranchers participate in programs that reduce conflicts so that bears and livestock stay safe," she adds.

"There are some great success stories about landowners using bear-proof containers for grain and livestock carcasses or electric fencing to discourage bears from entering their property," says Nichols. "What we really need are more public resources for these kinds of initiatives," he adds.

"One of the priority recommendations of the *Recovery Plan* is to improve the quality of grizzly habitat on Crown lands by reducing the number of roads and limiting motorized access," notes Morrison.

“However, since the Plan was introduced in 2008, the extent of roads, trails and motorized use of Crown lands has only increased, and this may be why we are seeing more bears on private lands,” she adds.

“Some media outlets are painting this as a ‘conservationists versus ranchers’ issue, but that’s not accurate,” notes Francis. “We want to work with provincial conservation staff and landowners to ensure that the resources and support exist to prevent conflicts, protect bears, and keep people and their property safe,” she adds

For more information:

Sean Nichols – AWA: 403-283-2025

Katie Morrison – CPAWS SAB: 403-232-6686

Wendy Francis – Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative: 403-763-8633