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Alberta  Government

Grizzly Bear Response Guide

8 September 2009

GRIZZLY BEAR RESPONSE GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

An effective wildlife management strategy must balance the needs of wildlife with those of the public. Protection of life and property is a priority, along with considering what is best for the grizzly population.

This guide provides a standard approach in deciding grizzly bear management responses. It is a resource for government staff who must act in situations of conflict where clear, concise and consistent direction is needed. The guide harmonizes with the province's Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan and is the result of collaboration among biologists, Fish and Wildlife officers, and problem wildlife specialists. Except in national parks, this guide will apply to specific events involving grizzly bears throughout the province, including lands within provincial parks and protected areas. The guide will be reviewed annually and revised as required.

This guide also shows Albertans how bear/human conflicts will be handled. Staff will use the guide as a reference to communicate with stakeholders and the public about managing problem grizzly bears and to promote public and community support for grizzly bear conservation.

PREVENTATIVE ACTION

Actions identified in this guide will be used only after preventative actions have proven insufficient for a specific grizzly bear.

Preventative action is the first response in most situations where a grizzly bear has not presented an immediate threat to humans. Preventative actions include:

- Assess situation/monitor;
- Close area to public access;
- Educate by providing information on wildlife behaviour and presence;
- Remove or order removal of attractants;
- Allow access by groups only;
- Erect electric fences around camps and/or attractants;
- Limit access through timing restrictions;
- Allow hard-sided accommodation only (no tents or tent trailers);
- Use aversive conditioning on site (within Fish and Wildlife Division guidelines); and
- Hard release involves release soon after capture and usually at the capture site, with harassment.

Often, preventative actions may be sufficient to prevent future incidents. For example, if a grizzly bear is defending a prey carcass, then closing the area to public access until the bear consumes or abandons the carcass will effectively prevent potentially dangerous encounters. Preventative action also may extend to a grizzly bear that presented an unprovoked threat to a person. For example, in a surprise encounter, if the grizzly makes contact with a human but does not continue the attack and leaves the area, closing the area may be the appropriate response.

USING THE GUIDE

If control actions are deemed necessary, this guide will be used to determine the appropriate response. The guide relies on the results of an incident investigation along with classification of the grizzly bear type, behaviour and history, to enable staff to determine appropriate response options to a conflict situation. Grizzlies have known behavioural patterns that, when combined with location, time and other factors, may indicate an incident is probable.

INVESTIGATION

Reports of grizzly bear/human conflict or property damage will be investigated by specially trained government staff. The aim of the investigation is to collect evidence, including witness reports and physical evidence that will provide an accurate account of the grizzly bear's actions, as well as any human activity involved.

CLASSIFICATION

Under classification we look at three main factors to help determine an appropriate response to a grizzly bear/human conflict or property damage. They include the age and family status of the animal (sow with cub, orphan, etc.), the animal's behaviour and its history. For example, a grizzly that has been involved in conflict in the past will be classified differently than one that has no history.

An experienced staff member will make these determinations based on evidence collected during an investigation, and may call upon other technical experts to assist with the evaluation. The subsequent response will be based on these factors as outlined in the guide.

The following age-based descriptions are used to define the type of grizzly bear involved in an incident:

- Cub: < 12 months
- Orphan Cub: < 12 months not accompanied by adult
- Young: A cub, yearling or sub-adult that is accompanying the mother
- Yearling: 12 - 24 months
- Sub-adult: 24-48 months
- Prime adult: > 48 months
- Old adult: Displays advanced age (tooth wear and deteriorated physical state)

A bear is also ranked based on its behaviour:

- **Nuisance:** A nuisance grizzly bear is an animal whose presence is likely to cause some people to feel apprehensive, particularly if the grizzly bear remains in the area for a period of time. The grizzly bear's behaviour is not unusual and does not appear to pose a threat to humans, pets or livestock.
- **Habituated:** A grizzly bear is habituated when it fails to avoid humans or areas frequented by humans and displays behaviours that create public safety concerns. The grizzly bear regularly uses unnatural food materials (such as garbage, pet food or livestock food) that have been reasonably secured from grizzly bears. It repeatedly frequents high human-use areas such as residential areas or campgrounds or feeds on agricultural crops in close proximity to humans.
- **Problem:** A problem grizzly bear has attacked, mauled, or is an immediate threat to a pet or livestock animal.
- **Offender:** An offender grizzly bear is one that presents an apparent threat to human safety or has had contact with a human after being provoked (i.e., the grizzly bear's actions were the result of or response to actions by the human).
- **Predator:** A predator grizzly bear is one that has killed a human and either fed upon or concealed the body, or has stalked, followed, pursued, chased or ambushed a human (unprovoked) resulting in a grizzly bear-human contact, whether or not the victim was killed or injured. If grizzly bear's young participated in the attack or fed upon the victim, then all members of the family group will
- be classified as Predator.

An animal's history is also used to determine an appropriate response, taking into account the number of times the behaviour of a particular grizzly has been rated against this guide.

RESPONSE

If a bear needs to be controlled, first it will be captured by culvert trap, snare or immobilization. This guide identifies four types of responses based on the age, behaviour and history of the bear:

1. Capture and relocation within the Bear Management Area, potentially with ear tag transmitter attached
 - Option for first incident of nuisance behaviour in males older than yearling, old adult females without young
 - Option for first incident of habituated or problem behaviours in sub-adult males
 - Mandatory for first incident, option for second incident, of nuisance, habituated and problem behaviours in yearlings, sub-adult and prime adult females, and females of any age with young
2. Capture and relocation outside the Bear Management Area, potentially with ear tag transmitter/GPS collar attached
 - Option for first incident of nuisance behaviours in males older than yearling, old adult females without young
 - Option for first incident of habituated and problem behaviours in sub-adult males
 - Option for first incident of offender behaviours in all types except old adult males and orphan cubs
 - Option for second incident, mandatory for third incident, of nuisance, habituated and problem behaviours in yearlings, sub-adult and prime adult female bears, and any female bears with young
 - Mandatory for first incident of habituated and problem behaviours in prime adult and old adult males, and old adult females without young
 - Mandatory for second incident of nuisance behaviours in prime adult and old adult males, and old adult females without young
 - Mandatory for second incident of habituated and problem behaviours in all types except old adult males and orphan cubs
 - Mandatory for third incident of nuisance behaviours in yearlings, sub-adult and prime adult female bears, and female bears of any age with young
3. Retention in captivity in a suitable location after capture
 - Option only for first incident of all behaviour ranks except predator in orphan cubs
 - Cubs orphaned because its mother was euthanized will be retained in captivity. If no acceptable facility can be found, the cub will be euthanized.
4. Euthanasia in accordance with Canada Council on Animal Care Guidelines
 - Option only for first incident of offender behaviours in all types but old adult male and orphan cub
 - Mandatory for first incident of predator behaviours for all types of grizzly bears. If a female grizzly bear with young is euthanized and there is no evidence the young participated in the predatory behaviour, then relocation or retention in captivity responses apply to the orphan cubs.
 - Mandatory for first incident of offender behaviour in old adult males, orphan cubs, and for second incident in all other types
 - Mandatory for second incident of habituated and problem behaviours in old adult males and orphan cubs, and for third incident in all other types
 - Mandatory for second incident of nuisance behaviour in orphan cubs; third incident in sub-adult and adult males and old adult females without young; fourth incident in yearlings, sub-adult and prime adult females, and all females with young

If euthanasia is identified as the appropriate response, a thorough review of the incident and the investigation results will be conducted to ensure the grizzly bear is appropriately classified before the animal is destroyed.