

Questions and Answers - Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan

Why was the Grizzly Bear Recovery Team established?

- In January 2002, a Status Report for grizzly bear in Alberta was completed as part of the department's regular wildlife management planning.
- The Scientific Subcommittee of Alberta's Endangered Species Conservation Committee (ESCC) reviewed the report in February 2002 and determined that the grizzly bear qualified for 'Threatened' status.
- In March 2002, the ESCC recommended that the grizzly be listed as a 'Threatened' species in Alberta and that a recovery plan be developed. The ESCC made several recommendations pending development and implementation of a recovery plan, including closure of the grizzly bear hunting season.
- Reliable population data were not available at the time, and many people believed that grizzly bear populations were secure in at least some portions of Alberta. Many people felt that a blanket ban on hunting was not warranted.
- The Minister at the time, Mike Cardinal, responded by:
 - 1) establishing a Recovery Team with the task of developing a recovery plan, and
 - 2) reviewing Alberta's approach to managing the annual spring grizzly bear hunt.
- Grizzly bears remained designated as a big game species and were not designated as Threatened. The department's experience with establishing recovery teams suggested that creating such a team would be a useful approach to help fill gaps and focus on conservation practices for grizzlies.
- The Grizzly Bear Recovery Team enabled government to bring to the table a broad group of biologists, land-use specialists, and resource-industry experts familiar with the natural resource-based working landscape that overlaps much of the grizzly bear's range.

Why has the plan taken so long?

- Establishing a Recovery Plan is a large and complex task. Such a plan has to take into consideration the knowledge, expertise and perspectives` of multiple stakeholders such as hunters, resource industries, livestock producers, and environmentalists. In addition, the uncertainty regarding population estimates, and the extensive range of grizzly bears (from Alaska to Montana) made this a challenging effort.
- The goal was to establish a long-term recovery plan that would balance these viewpoints and ensure grizzly bears are maintained on Alberta's landscape.
- The plan incorporated complex issues regarding education, access management, policy and legislation.
- To ensure the Recovery Plan met the proper standards, a scientific review process was employed.
- The review was conducted both internally with Sustainable Resource Development and also with external independent experts.

Timeline:

- October 2002 - the Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Team was first appointed.
- February 2005 - the first comprehensive Recovery Plan draft was submitted.
- February 2005 to November 2005 - discussion between Recovery Team and Sustainable Resource Development.
- November 2005 - an internal review of the document by Sustainable Resource Development was completed.
- March 2006 - independent peer review comments sent to the Recovery Team for response.
- December 2006, Minister Ted Morton was appointed Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.
- December 2006 - Recovery Team submitted additional revisions arising from internal and external reviews; Sustainable Resource Development initiates final review.
- June 2007 - Minister Ted Morton met with Recovery Team.
- October 2007 - draft Recovery Plan accepted and final editing and formatting begins.
- April 2008 – Recovery Plan posted to website as final.

What are the key recommendations of the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan?

Most of the recovery plan had already been accepted before final posting. At this time, all components are in progress or have been completed.

1) Reduce human-caused mortality

Recommendation	Action taken
Suspend the hunt temporarily. Manage access and other land uses in grizzly bear habitats.	Hunt suspended (for 3 years) in 2006. Moratorium will stay in place until results of the 2008 DNA-based population survey are available to provide a provincial reassessment of population status. Important habitat areas have been mapped, and Access Management Teams are working towards developing Area-specific access management strategies.

2) Improve Knowledge

Recommendation	Action taken
Determine population sizes and set targets.	DNA-based surveys since 2004; nearing completion of foothills habitats.
Monitor mortality, health and recruitment.	Mortality database established in 2004. Information posted on website goes back to 2000. Maintained on annual basis.
Track and analyze habitat conditions.	Completed for most of Alberta's grizzly bear range from Montana north to the Grande Cache area. Information will be used for planning and managing grizzly

	bear habitats.
Conduct research to address knowledge gaps, (e.g., reproductive and health data).	Health status research initiated in 2006.
Improve provincial grizzly bear database.	Completed.

3a) Reduce human/bear conflicts (“Working with People”)

Recommendation	Action Taken
Control bear attractants through public education.	Part of ongoing activities, including activities under the BearSmart program.
Hire “conflict prevention” staff.	Some enhancement to field staff, who currently provide some service in this area.
Improve hunter training and testing.	Enhanced information to hunters implemented in 2006.
Increase resources and field presence of F&W Officers (both for enforcement and education).	Increased Officer involvement in enforcement, education and prevention efforts since 2003.
Avoid creating conflicts with new grazing leases.	Currently a consideration in reviewing new grazing lease applications.
Improve existing agricultural operations to reduce conflicts.	Part of ongoing education/prevention efforts, including BearSmart program.
Improve communications about feeding dangerous wildlife.	Part of ongoing activities, including activities under the BearSmart program.

3b) Reduce conflicts (“Manage Bear Behaviour”)

Recommendation	Action Taken
Improve problem bear management (decision matrix for problem bear management).	Ongoing
Improve ability to analyze causes of conflicts (standardize conflict categories).	Completed
Assess utility of intercept feeding, and develop standards.	Ongoing
Assess utility of aversive conditioning and develop standards.	Ongoing
Assess utility of controlling natural attractants in conflict areas.	Ongoing as part of the WildSmart program being implemented in the Canmore area.

4) Improve and deliver education and outreach program

Recommendation	Action Taken
Develop a province-wide education and outreach program to inform and engage the public in grizzly bear recovery.	The BearSmart program substantially satisfies this recommendation.

5) Identify, Track and Maintain Habitat for Grizzly Bears

Recommendation	Action Taken
Continue model development to quantify bear habitat.	Work completed under Foothills Research Institute (formally Foothills Model Forest).

6) Improve Inter-jurisdictional Coordination

Recommendation	Action Taken
Participate in IGBC (Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee).	Ongoing
Participate in comprehensive inter-agency database.	Information is shared as required.

7) Improve Regulations/Legislation

Recommendation	Action Taken
Mechanism for, and enforcement of, restricted access use.	Partial implementation. Requires cross-department effort.

What recommendations have not been accepted and why?

There are three areas of the plan which Sustainable Resource Development is not endorsing at this time or is addressing in another way.

- 1) The Grizzly Bear Recovery Team used population models that assumed natural mortality of independent bears could be higher than six per cent.
 - Sustainable Resource Development, supported by independent peer review, believes the actual rate is much lower. This disagreement does not present an obstacle to implementing conservation actions recommended by the recovery plan. As new data become available, this issue will be reviewed.
 - 2) The plan recommends improved compensation for livestock depredation.
 - This is being considered within the context of an overall review of provincial policies regarding agricultural damage compensation programs.
 - 3) The plan recommends that multi-stakeholder Regional Implementation Teams be established to oversee local-level implementation.
 - Sustainable Resource Development prefers to explore other options that might be more efficient and effective.
 - A Research Advisory Committee has been established to advise the department on grizzly bear research priorities and to promote coordination of research activities.
- In addition, it is noted that the Recovery Plan calls for significantly increased funding and staffing to support its recommendations.
 - Acceptance of the Recovery Plan does not automatically translate into enhanced budgets. Budget decisions will be made in the usual manner, recognizing all of the priorities faced by the department.

How will the recommendations be implemented?

The first new step arising from Recovery Plan approval is to initiate work on the recommendations for access management in important grizzly bear habitats. An Access Management Team has been established to provide direction for this process, which will be carried out largely at the regional level. Important grizzly bear habitats have already been mapped, based on spatial data provided by Foothills Research Institute, and modified with input from Sustainable Resource Development field staff.

- The Access Management Team will provide detailed instructions and standards for SRD field staff to develop area-specific access management strategies in identified important habitat areas.
- Draft access management strategies will be reviewed with stakeholders to gain additional input and advice.
- Areas will be established and managed; for example, managing motorized public access in important grizzly bear habitat.

The second step will be coordinating conservation efforts at a local level.

- Grizzly bear conservation involves a considerable range of activities. These need to be coordinated at the field level with the involvement of Sustainable Resource Development staff, other government agencies, industry, and other stakeholders.

The third step will be looking at regulatory changes regarding:

- bear depredation of livestock,
- public motorized access,
- feeding dangerous wildlife, and
- storage of bear attractants by private and municipal landowners.

Along with all of these steps will be an ongoing evaluation of staffing and budget requirements.

What are the current estimated populations of grizzly bears in the province?

The 2004 survey was designed to sample a single population unit (south and southeast of Hinton/Edson area) between Hwy 16 and Hwy 11.

- 39 individual bears' DNA was captured at bait sites.
- 5 additional bears identified from other sampling methods.
- Population estimate was 42 (range, 36 to 55) grizzly bears.
- Density estimate was 4.79 bears per 1,000 square kilometres.

The 2005 survey covered between Hwy 11 and Hwy 1 (between Nordegg/Rocky Mountain House south to Banff/Canmore).

- 42 individual bears' DNA was identified.
- Population estimate was 45 (range, 41 to 52).
- Density estimate was 5.25 bears per 1,000 square kilometres.

The 2006 survey covered between Hwy 1 to Hwy 3 (between Banff/Canmore and Crowsnest Pass).

- 85 individual bears' DNA was captured, mostly along the west of the study area.
- Population estimate was 90 (range, 75 to 116). An additional 43 bears move in and out of the area, but are not full time residents.
- Density estimate (full time residents) was 11.77 bears per 1,000 square kilometres.

The 2007 survey covered the area from Highway 3 south to the Montana border.

- 27 individual bears' DNA was identified.
- Population estimate was 51.2 (range, 38.4 to 86.7).
- Density estimate was 18.1 bears per 1,000 square kilometres.

In summer of 2008, field work was completed for a population survey within a large area between Highway 16 and Grande Cache, including Jasper National Park and provincial protected areas.

What would be considered an ideal number of grizzly bears in the province?

- There is no target number for grizzly bears in the province stated in this plan.
- The underlying goal is to ensure grizzly bear populations are maintained in Alberta indefinitely.
- The grizzly bear population data will provide us with a baseline to determine if grizzly bear populations are increasing, stable or decreasing.
- Management activities such as reducing the number of negative human-bear interactions through the BearSmart program will be used as one measure of success of this Recovery Plan, since grizzly bear conservation depends on social acceptance of the value of keeping grizzly bears on the landscape.

Will grizzly bears be listed as Threatened or Endangered?

- This is outside the scope of the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan.
- Government is committed to gathering reliable population data (through DNA-based population estimates, ongoing since 2004) and will be reviewing the status of the species when the 2008 population survey is complete.
- In the meantime, Sustainable Resource Development will continue to undertake conservation actions as recommended in the recovery plan.

Will the spring grizzly bear hunt be reinstated?

- A moratorium on hunting will continue until after the results of the 2008 population survey are available.
- Following that, a decision will be made based on the best available information, including a reassessment of the provincial population status.

- In the meantime, Sustainable Resource Development will continue to take conservation actions as recommended in the recovery plan.

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Who were the members of the Grizzly Bear Recovery Team?

The recovery team was a multi-stakeholder group with knowledge and interests in various relevant areas. It included representation from governments, conservation groups, industry and academia. They include:

- Gordon Stenhouse, Foothills Model Forest (Co-Chair)
- Lisa Wilkinson, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish and Wildlife Division (Co-Chair)
- Dr. Rick Bonar, Alberta Forest Products Association
- Andy Boyd, Alberta Fish and Game Association
- Dr. Mark Boyce, University of Alberta
- Rob Staniland, Canadian Association Of Petroleum Producers
- Peter Zimmerman, environmental non-government organizations (Alberta Wilderness Association, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Association, Grizzly Bear Alliance, Yellowstone to Yukon)
- David Penner, Federation of Alberta Naturalists
- Dave Hobson, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish and Wildlife Division
- Rick Blackwood, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Southern Rockies Area
- Dr. Robert Barclay, University of Calgary
- Darryl Carlson, Western Stock Growers Association
- Kevin Williams, Alberta Energy
- Bill Tinge, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Lands Division
- Dr. Mike Gibeau, Parks Canada