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*AFGA Position Paper, February 2005*

## **AFGA Position on Grizzly Bear Hunting in Alberta**

The Alberta Government has been coordinating the review of Grizzly Bear management in Alberta with a team of representatives from various organizations. The AFGA and other stakeholders have been involved in the Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Team and the Endangered Species Conservation Committee.

The management plans are provided by the team as advice to the Minister responsible for fish and wildlife management (the Minister) and to all Albertans. Alberta's Endangered Species Conservation Committee reviews completed recovery plans, and provides recommendations to the Minister.

The AFGA has also reviewed the documents and discussed the issues and solutions. The objectives of this AFGA document are:

- (a) to identify the issues associated with Grizzly Bear hunting in Alberta and
- (b) to identify solutions to the issues or concerns.

### **The Issues**

#### **1. Increased Restrictions or Prohibition on Grizzly Bear Hunting**

Recent discussions in various committees including the Endangered Species Conservation Committee have been reviewing the status of grizzly bears in Alberta. There has been some suggestion that the hunting of these bears should be discontinued due to the perceived status of the population. This is a concern of the AFGA.

#### **2. Scientific Information Regarding Grizzly Bear Population Size**

The government information and that of independent reviewers suggests that over the past 15 years the Alberta Grizzly Bear population has increased from 575 in 1988 to 968 in 2002. During this period of time the number harvested by hunters averaged 13.6 per year.

These numbers were revised in more recent reviews of the existing information to indicate there were less bears. Again, more local studies have indicated higher local

populations and anecdotal observations from outdoors users, hunters, outfitters, officers, ranchers, and land use workers have indicated higher numbers of observations now compared to those from the 1960's and 1970's and 1980's.

The accuracy of the population trends is at issue.

### **3. Impact of Hunting on the Alberta Grizzly Bear Population**

Legal hunting has harvested an average of only 13.6 grizzly bears per year for the past 15 years. The actual harvest has been insignificant. Hunting does not appear to be a major factor.

Further the information on other mortalities of grizzly bears, including illegal harvest, self-protection and vehicle collisions also indicates relatively small numbers of bears being lost annually.

### **4. Desired Grizzly Bear Population Size in Alberta**

What is the desired Alberta grizzly bear population size in Alberta? The desired target on a provincial and a regional basis needs to be addressed in order that the numbers can be properly maintained and managed. This is a key issue to addressing any management decisions. Items such as suitable habitat, size of territories, and proximity to urban and rural development need to be considered.

## **The Solutions**

### **1. Conservation First**

The AFGA believes in conservation first and in the case of grizzly bears a small harvest with management controls appears to be effective in maintaining and increasing this natural resource. The AFGA believes that through continued use (i.e. hunting) there is a stronger motive to monitor and manage the grizzly bear population and in so doing, there will be an increased knowledge and awareness of the status and health of the population.

### **2. Target Population Size**

The development of the desired grizzly bear population size and regional distribution should be developed and reviewed by all stakeholders. This should become the basis of the future management plan.

### **3. Validity and Reliability of Scientific Information**

The creation of new population assessment models requires careful scrutiny. With the low hunting harvest numbers during the past 15 years and a more subjective non-scientific, population assessment by ranchers and hunters along with the current

government estimates, the AFGA agree with the numbers that indicate at least a stable or increasing bear population.

The monitoring of populations and harvest should continue to establish a more reliable and valid population size.

#### 4. **Continuation of Hunting Grizzly Bears in Alberta**

The small number of bears harvested through legal hunting appears to have no effect on the increasing population of grizzly bears. The AFGA will continue to work with the Minister to maintain healthy populations of fish and wildlife resources. The AFGA believes that the continuation of the hunt is necessary and does contribute to the ongoing monitoring, funding for monitoring and conservation of this species.

Observations from some individuals indicate that the behaviour of grizzly bears is influenced by hunting and in so doing, "hunting keeps bears wild".

#### 5. **Education in Alberta Schools**

The Alberta Government along with organizations such as the AFGA should continue to teach the importance of hunting as a useful management tool in the overall conservation of Grizzly Bears in Alberta.

#### 6. **Monitoring**

Monitoring of the grizzly bear population size and harvest should continue. A clear and efficient monitoring plan should be developed and a commitment of government funding will be required to provide the effective monitoring.

**The Alberta Fish and Game Association** is a not-for-profit volunteer organization that has been active in habitat conservation since 1908 and has a province-wide membership of well over 14,000 individuals committed to maintaining Alberta's natural heritage.

**AFGA**  
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