

Trophy Hunting of Grizzly Bears in the Great Bear Rainforest

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Every year, about 350 grizzly bears are killed, most of them in the Great Bear Rainforest, as part of the annual grizzly trophy hunt in British Columbia. Questions remain, however, as to the viability of such a hunt in view of various factors including bear populations, physical and environmental stress on the bears, the availability of sustainable conservation programs, British Columbia's capacity in enforcing hunting regulations, as well as the economic benefits of such sport hunt. The current biological and management situation for grizzly bears in British Columbia clearly substantiates making their hunting for trophies unjustifiable, and as a result, the hunt should be outlawed.

Knowledge of Bear Population Dynamics

Although the population of grizzly bears in British Columbia's Great Bear Rainforest has been poorly assessed and population estimates remain undependable, current data seem to point to a marked decrease in population. According to the British Columbia Ministry of Environment (BCMOE), there were an estimated 16,887 grizzly bears (*ursus arctos*) in the Canadian province in 2004, with the highest concentration located in the Great Bear Rainforest (Hamilton, Heard, and Austin 4). These figures were down 13% from the estimated population of 19,389 of *U. arctos* in 2001 (Hamilton, Heard, and Austin 5). BCMOE established no trend in population, officially recognizing "the uncertainty surrounding both estimates" (Hamilton, Heard, and Austin 5). Notwithstanding such unreliability with respect to the actual number of grizzly bears living in British Columbia, the BCMOE noted that in 2004, the grizzlies were already threatened in nine Grizzly Bear Population Units, and extirpated in several areas of the province covering an estimated 10% of BC's land mass (Hamilton, Heard, and Austin 5). The number of threatened grizzly bear population units also increased to 11 in 2005 (Horesji and Gilbert 9). Going back a century, it also appears that "the grizzly population in North America has decreased by half" (Greenpeace). There is overall "strong evidence of a decline in grizzly populations" in the Great Bear Rainforest (Gilbert et al 3). The State of Alaska has even elevated the threatened status to endangered for grizzlies whose ecosystem is shared with Canada (Horesji and Gilbert 9). There are two main aspects to the government and scientific data assessing the grizzly bear populations in British Columbia. While the population figures appear unreliable, they are from the only reputable official sources. The data also point towards a decline in the number of bears, best illustrated by the fact the *U. arctos* is threatened, or even already extinct, in various parts of the province. It is as a result impossible to contend that grizzly bear populations in British Columbia, and more specifically in the Great Bear Rainforest, can support trophy hunting.

Habitat and Food Stresses on Bear Populations

U. arctos in the Great Bear Rainforest are under additional stress, as the bears are also threatened by habitat destruction and a collapse of the salmon fisheries. According to the David Suzuki Foundation, "74% of logging in Canada's rainforest is clear-cut logging," which "is defined by the removal of over 70% of the trees from a specific logging site" (1). Current regulations also leave 75% of the Great Bear Rainforest unprotected from logging, and expose "83% of the most suitable grizzly habitat at risk of development" (David Suzuki Foundation 7).

The government of British Columbia itself admitted that its irresponsible logging practices have caused unnecessary environmental damage in the past (McAllister 138). Such findings confirm the Great Bear Rainforest, and thus, prime grizzly bear habitat, is threatened by past and current logging practices, placing yet more pressure on the grizzlies.

In addition to losing its habitat, the grizzly bear in the Great Bear Rainforest is progressively losing its main source of food. Indeed, “salmon may make up as much as 95 percent of coastal grizzlies’ fall diet,” yet, salmon fisheries in north western BC have essentially collapsed (McAllister 22). Across British Columbia, less than a quarter of salmon are returning to spawning grounds from previous years. In the Fraser River alone, only 524,000 salmon have returned in 2004, down from over 2 million four years earlier (Regan 36). Salmon streams in the Great Bear Rainforest are under threat, as “46% of logging in the area is taking place in the most productive salmon watersheds” (David Suzuki Foundation 1). Moreover, Ian McAllister, of the Raincoast Conservation Foundation, estimates that up to 80 intact watersheds in the Great Bear Rainforest are at risk (136). Such data point to ever decreasing numbers of salmon and thus no reliable and enduring access to food for the *U. Arctos*, placing the animal under further stress.

Quality of Population and Habitat Management – British Columbia and Alaska

British Columbia has also failed to implement adequate conservation and protection programs and “to meet protected areas standards for the conservation of grizzly bear populations and habitat in the northern Great Bear Rainforest” (Horesji and Gilbert 1). The Tongass National Forest in Alaska has established 27 medium Habitat Conservation Areas (HCAs) of about 81 sq. km for grizzly bears, and is proposing 84 additional HCAs, for a total of 111 (Horesji and Gilbert 16). British Columbia is far behind Alaska. In contrast to Alaska, conservation strategies in British Columbia’s North Coast, an ecosystem shared with Alaska, do not currently have any medium HCAs, and are only proposing the establishment of 2 HCAs (Horesji and Gilbert 16). Based on individual bear home ranges, movements, population densities, and effective population sizes, as well as other North American plans and practices, notably in Alaska, British Columbia’s management and protection plans in the Great Bear Rainforest are “dangerously inadequate and a threat to the ecological integrity of the North Coast rainforest landscape” (Horesji and Gilbert 3). Various scientists, including Barrie Gilbert, of the Department of Forestry, Range and Wildlife Services, at Utah State University, even believe that under the current British Columbia’s North Coast Land and Resource Management Plan (NCLRMP), “grizzly bears in British Columbia are on a long-term slide leading to extinction” (Gilbert et al 3). Under such circumstances, it is therefore undeniably evident that the trophy hunting of grizzly bears in British Columbia’s Great Bear rainforest should not be allowed.

Inability to Enforce Hunting Regulations

Another element that does not favor the annual grizzly bear hunt in British Columbia is the BC government’s inability to enforce hunting regulations, or efficiently fight poaching. Indeed, British Columbia’s per capita expenditure on fish and wildlife law enforcement in coastal areas was only \$7.15 in 2004, compared to \$27.85 in Alaska (Horesji 7). Additionally, there was a 15% decrease in the number of conservation officers in British Columbia, while Alaska has steadily been adding troopers at the rate of 6% since 1994 (Horesji 7). BC further budgeted \$74,890 per officer in 2002, with no change from 1992, while Alaska provided \$152,401 per trooper in 2002, an increase of \$21,114 from 1992 (Horesji 8). With such limited

means and resources, conservation officers in British Columbia do not have the capability to enforce the law. An expected result of British Columbia's inherent lack of enforcement is that although hunters are supposed to only target male bears during the annual grizzly bear trophy hunt in the province, 50% of the 350 grizzly bears legally harvested in British Columbia each year are females (McAllister 50). It is further evident that trophy hunters cannot take it upon themselves to comply with British Columbia's hunting regulations or to reflect on conservation issues. In an article in the magazine *Outdoor Life*, Jim Zumbo writes that "Most U.S. sportsmen don't care about Canada's politics--they want to hunt, pure and simple" (18). It is therefore no wonder that grizzly bears hunted are as well "increasingly younger and smaller" (McAllister 50). Clearly, British Columbia is not committing enough resources, both in terms of spending and actual numbers of conservation officers, that would ensure hunting regulations and thus conservation policies are enforced. Without such commitment, it is impossible to warrant that grizzly bears will not be harvested illegally, or that any grizzly trophy hunt will be conducted within the law, thereby placing the *U. Arctos* at further risk.

Economic Considerations – Competing Benefits

Trophy hunters point to the economic benefits of the annual hunt in British Columbia. Indeed, the hunt brings \$3.3 million to grizzly hunting guides and outfitters every year. The amount is however about half of the \$6.1 million generated by grizzly bear viewing eco-tourism operations in the province (Parker and Gorter 8). Taking photos of bears contributes about twice as much to BC economic activity in terms of revenue as trophy hunting, but the total for bear viewing activities does not include all the other eco-tourism operations in British Columbia. Eco-tourism in general, although not specifically focusing on grizzly bear watching, is nonetheless dependant on the presence of the grizzlies as part of the image of the great Canadian wilderness (Parker and Gorter 8). In addition, the revenue generated by the killing of a bear is limited and final, while taking photos of the same bear, alive, could bring revenue for the lifespan of the animal of over 30 years. Trophy hunts are also elitist in nature, both in terms of experience and revenue. Indeed, it costs over \$10,000 to hunt a grizzly bear in the Great Bear Rainforest, an amount few people would be able to afford (Sawtooth Outfitters). Most of this amount then only benefits small outfitter operations, of often not more than two guides. In contrast, taking photos of grizzly bears is far more accessible to the average visitor to Canada at around \$1,500 per trip (Ancient Rainforest Expedition). The revenue also profits a wider range of individuals, with most eco-tourism operations having a staff of over 20 people. More importantly, the relatively small economic benefits of trophy hunting threaten the higher revenues of the eco-tourism industry, which relies on bears being alive for the survival and viability of its operators.

Conclusions

The current public policy supporting the trophy hunting of grizzly bears in the Great Bear Rainforest of British Columbia is ill-advised. Indeed, bear population estimates in British Columbia are inconclusive, but all data point to a marked decrease of the grizzlies over the years. The grizzly are also further threatened by the destruction of their habitat through clear-cut logging, a collapse of the salmon fisheries which represent their main source of food, and the province of British Columbia's lack of commitment to the protection and conservation of grizzly bears. It is also evident that ongoing budget cuts have hindered British Columbia's ability to enforce hunting regulations, resulting in abuses and the province's inability to properly monitor the trophy hunt. Finally, although the annual grizzly trophy hunt brings some economic benefit

to the province, such revenue pales in comparison to the millions of dollars generated with the simple viewing of the bears through eco-tourism operations. All factors taken into consideration, it now appears evident that the trophy hunting of grizzly bears in BC's Great Bear Rainforest should be outlawed.

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