

OPEN LETTER TO THE BC GOVERNMENT OPPOSING THE GRIZZLY BEAR “MEAT HUNT”

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We, the undersigned 45 environmental and animal welfare organizations, wildlife-based businesses, and independent activists, are pleased that the current BC government is committed to end the trophy hunt of grizzly bears. However we strongly oppose the government's plans to allow continued grizzly bear hunting, under the pretext of hunting for meat, except for a jointly-regulated First Nations ceremonial/sustenance hunt. Part of the Great Bear Rainforest would have a total ban on hunting, but that's only a very small part of grizzly bear habitat in BC. We oppose the meat hunt for the following reasons:

1. Grizzly bears are a species at risk. They are blue-listed in BC, and threatened by poaching, human conflicts, habitat destruction and hunting. They have disappeared from 18% of their range in BC. (1) Out of 56 grizzly bear subpopulations in BC, 9 are classified as “threatened” by British Columbia.
2. We expect to see much trophy hunting continued under the guise of “meat” hunting. In the past, almost all grizzly bear hunting has been trophy hunting. Many hunters find the meat unpalatable. Grizzly bears were included by BC Fish & Wildlife with non-game animals such as wolverines, wolves and cougars. Previously, BC hunting regulations have had a provision allowing hunters to leave the meat on the ground and take only the trophy parts. People do not travel hundreds or thousands of kilometres, pay tens of thousands of dollars, and risk their lives shooting at grizzly bears to put meat on the table. The proposed new regulations for meat hunting will simply disguise trophy hunting as meat hunting. Even if the head, hide and claws are left on the ground, or given to a conservation officer, the hunter will take away trophy videos, photographs and bragging rights. The bears will still be killed for sport.

The BC government is considering various options to distinguish trophy hunting from meat hunting, but they only increase our conviction that this division is unenforceable. For many years BC has been unable to control substantial poaching of bears, how will it account for every trophy part of every bear shot by hunters?

3. The government has claimed the grizzly hunt is sustainable. However, independent biologists have been saying for years that this is not true. We do not even know with certainty how many grizzly bears there are in BC, or how many can be killed without reducing the population. Peer-reviewed studies by scientists have found numerous cases of too many bears being killed (by all causes), even according to the government's own population numbers. Studies have proven that hunters often kill too many female bears. The European Union investigated BC's grizzly bear hunt, ruled it environmentally unsustainable, and banned the import of trophies.
4. Closing the meat hunt in a limited area will concentrate hunting in other areas. While the government proposes to stop all grizzly bear hunting in part of the Great Bear Rainforest, this is only a small part of grizzly bear habitat across BC. Grizzly bear hunting in this area will simply move to other coastal and interior areas of the province.

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Nature-based Businesses/
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Pacific Rainforest Adventure Tours
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Steve Williamson Photography
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West Coast Wild Art
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In addition, the undersigned object to the following aspects of the public consultation process for the new grizzly bear hunting regulations.

1. The process only considers how to manage the meat hunt, not whether there should even be a meat hunt. Participants are forced to accept the meat hunt as fait accompli.
2. Poor public access to information. Only those who sign confidentiality agreements can have access to some important information. Only those willing to sign the confidentiality agreements can be “stakeholders”, which receive priority consultation. The government has not released a complete list of stakeholders. The process was not advertised until recently, when it had already been running about a month, unbeknownst to many undersigned organizations. The confidentiality agreements represent muzzling of public organizations and suppressing information.

In June of this year, 23 organizations concerned with the welfare of wildlife sent a letter to the BC government that stated: “The wildlife of the province belongs to all British Columbians, and has by law been held by the government in trust.” The letter came about because the provincial government had been giving hunting organizations and related businesses priority access to consultation on matters related to wildlife, resulting in glaring policy bias.

Today the undersigned organizations and businesses are seeking increased recognition by the government that BC wildlife belongs to all Canadians, who have an equal stake in how it is managed, and an equal right to relevant information. We expect proportionate representation in all provincial wildlife matters. BC has over 1,500 species at risk. Recognizing the worldwide biodiversity crisis, the management of our wildlife must shift away from maximizing how many animals hunters can kill, to the practice of conservation biology to ensure the survival of species at risk.

We hold that the upcoming Auditor General’s report on the grizzly bear hunt — which was due to be released in September — is critical information for all parties to have before making decisions on this issue. Rushing to change the hunting regulations before the report is released wastes the tax dollars that have been spent to better inform decision-making. We urge the BC government not to authorize any further grizzly bear hunting until it has done a full review of public input and the soon-to-be released Auditor General’s report.

Sincerely,
45 Signators

References

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2. Artelle, K. A., Anderson, S. C., Cooper, A. B., Paquet, P. C., Reynolds, J. D., Darimont, C. T., “Confronting Uncertainty in Wildlife Management: Performance of Grizzly Bear Management,” PLOS ONE, Nov. 2013, Vol. 8, <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article/file?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0078041&type=printable>