

Advocating for grizzly bear recovery in Alberta

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From an ecological perspective, Alberta's grizzly bear has been a threatened species for decades. Excessive rates of human-caused mortality, habitat alteration and fragmentation, and the ineffectual management of natural resources have led to the decline of the Alberta grizzly bear population. As of 2002, only 500 individuals roamed some 230,000 km² in western Alberta. Despite the fact this information was known and understood at least as far back as 1988, politicians and agencies in Alberta did nothing to prevent the grizzly bear's continued slide toward extinction – until now. It is only because of the effective advocacy of a small group of Albertans that the recovery process for this sensitive keystone species has begun. Since the Alberta Endangered Species Conservation Committee recommended to the provincial government that the grizzly bear be listed as a threatened species in 2002, the government has reluctantly begun to look into the possibility of recovery. While it hasn't listed the grizzly bear as a threatened species – the first time in history the government hasn't followed the recommendation of the AESCC – it has increased poaching fines, attempted to reduce the number of bears killed during the grizzly bear hunt, and set up a recovery planning team. Of course, none of this guarantees the survival of the Alberta grizzly bear, but it is the beginning of a process that may just get us there. And, according to one senior Alberta government bureaucrat, the only reason that process has started is because of effective advocacy from a concerned citizenry: "What has brought about change is a function of media attention and public controversy." This presentation will outline the history of the Alberta grizzly bear, the reasons for its decline, the political response to date, and the steps necessary for a successful recovery.