



Title: YCS Grizzly Bear Conservation Position Paper

Date: September 25, 2020

End goal

Our ultimate goal is for grizzlies to be secure, and that this powerful species receives the deep respect it deserves as articulated by several forms of knowledge.

Positions and Solutions

The Yukon is a haven where Grizzlies thrive in an intact landscape in harmony with people. YCS lends its voice to Grizzlies and all voiceless species.

Action Plan

- Advocate for a full census of Grizzlies in the Yukon
- Advocate for a Yukon Species at Risk Act (YSARA)
 - List Grizzlies in YSARA as “Special Concern”
- Support public education on how to live with bears
 - Work towards a certified Human/Bear Conflict Avoidance program
- Oppose the trophy hunting of Grizzlies
 - Encourage a wildlife and tourism ethos where bears are appreciated alive
- Support First Nations as they assert their Rights and Titles in relation to the conservation of Grizzlies.

Introduction

Grizzly bears and their close relatives European Brown bears once ranged from the Atlantic across Eurasia to North America, extending East at least as far as Hudson Bay and North almost to the Arctic Ocean and South to the Gulf of Mexico. They once occupied a wide range of almost circumpolar habitats.

Grizzlies require large home ranges and access to a wide variety of plant and animal based food. Grizzlies’ appetite and omnivorous diet combined with their strength and potential ferocity have long placed them high on the list of animals that humanity is respectful of, especially Indigenous peoples. Europeans tended to temper this respect with fear which often turned to hatred. Consequently, Brown bears were extirpated from much of Europe by the time Europeans reached North America and encountered true Grizzlies.



In little more than 200 years, Grizzlies were extirpated from most of their Southern and more Eastern habitats, with healthy populations now confined to parts of far Western Alberta, B.C., Yukon, parts of NWT and Alaska.

Reasoning for Positions

The Grizzly Bear Conservation Plan explicitly ensures that the goals and management actions do not oblige any of the parties to the Plan or to follow through with any action(s). However, the existence of the Plan does provide a powerful mechanism to prompt regulators and assessors to ensure their actions are consistent with the goals of the Plan. Members of the YCS Wildlife Committee have articulated a set of goals and positions that are generally consistent with the Guiding Principles in the Plan.

1. That there is no harvest until a comprehensive population status is completed and documented;
2. Phase out trophy hunts entirely, but if continued to be severely restricted;
3. Federal designation under SARA should be raised to 'threatened'
4. Yukon endangered species legislation is essential and the Grizzly Bears be listed following the Canadian SARA status;
5. Ban all road hunting, including hunting from ATV's;
6. Zero tolerance of all artificial feeding: purposeful or accidental;
7. Teach the public the skills of living with bears;
8. Grizzlies support tourism opportunities.

Next Review Date: June 1st, 2021



Appendix A

Background:

Belatedly recognizing that the steady disappearance of this apex predator and umbrella species was both a symptom and a cause of wider ecosystem degradation as well as a tragedy in its own right, Canada's Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) recommended that Grizzly bears be listed under the Species At Risk Act (SARA) as being of "Special Concern", meaning that if current trends continue, if nothing changes, Grizzly bears could lose more of their numbers and more of their habitat and become "Threatened" and then "Endangered", as they had in many other places before they were "Extirpated".

One of the consequences of SARA listing was that the Yukon developed a Conservation Plan for Grizzly bears, in order that the Yukon's Grizzly population remains healthy.

Led by the Yukon Fish & Wildlife Management Board (YFWMB), a Grizzly Bear Conservation and Management Plan was produced and adopted in October 2019.

Grizzly Bear Conservation and Management Plan Recommendations:

1. Foster a cultural connection to, and respect for, grizzly bears.
2. Take care of the land and other species that grizzly bears require.
3. Improve decision making by acquiring better knowledge about grizzly bears.
4. Minimize human-grizzly bear conflicts.
5. Ensure grizzly bear harvest is sustainable.
6. Foster safe grizzly bear viewing.
7. Better understand human dimensions of grizzly bear conservation.

YCS Positions and Grizzly Bear Conservation and Management Plan Recommendations:

1. No harvest without complete population status documentation
 - a. This position is intended to encourage a full census of Grizzlies in the Yukon, #s 3 and 5.
 - b. The Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust (YFWET) is sponsoring an innovative and economic method of assessing Grizzly populations
 - c. It probably makes sense to concentrate census efforts in areas with harvest pressure.
 - d. A harvest moratorium will be very difficult to achieve.
2. Phase out trophy hunts completely; if continued, severely restrict
 - a. This position is consistent with actions recently taken in British Columbia and can be linked to #s 1 and 7



- b. This action will certainly produce opposition, including from Outfitters. Outfitters have a long history of supporting the YCS effort to set aside large swathes of the Yukon for conservation.
 - c. We have not suggested a time frame for phasing out trophy hunting.
 - d. While this should certainly remain a long-term goal of YCS, pushing for immediate action risks jeopardizing other goals.
 3. Federal designation under SARA should raise to 'threatened'
 - a. Should a census (# 3) show that Grizzly populations are declining, YCS could petition COSEWIC to raise the status of Yukon Grizzlies to Threatened, or, conceivably, Endangered.
 - b. This is not consistent with the observation below from Committee members that "Special Concern" is probably correct.
 - c. Protecting adequate habitat and promoting other actions to reduce Grizzly mortality so that Grizzlies can be considered "Not at Risk in the Yukon" seems a more logical, effective and achievable goal.
 4. Yukon endangered species legislation essential
 - a. Acknowledging that Canada's SARA's response is often slow with a spotty record of protecting Canada's at-risk species, YCS could leverage #2 to argue for a Yukon SARA.
 - b. This is not directly tied to conservation of Grizzly bears, rather it is a more general, and worthy, conservation goal
 - c. If we succeed in Position #3, this position would be redundant, at least regarding Grizzly bears.
 5. Ban all road hunting, hunting from ATV's,
 - a. #s 1 and 6. The Plan does allow for local groups such as Renewable Resources Councils to propose local roadside hunting bans.
 - b. Roads in the Southern Lakes area have been designated for no hunting corridors out to 100m.
 - c. This position is redundant if we are serious about position #1.
 6. Zero tolerance of all artificial feeding: purposeful or accidental
 - a. # 4. This is already illegal, although there is no solid definition of Attractant as yet.
 7. TEACH the public the skills of living with bears
 - a. #s 1,4,6 and 7
 8. Grizzlies support tourism opportunities
 - a. #s 1,2 and 7 This is not really a position, rather it is an observation.



Appendix B

SUPPORTING THE POSITIONS (considerations from the Wildlife Committee):

- a) **The Grizzly is one of the most potent symbols of Canada's remaining wilderness.** It functions as a **flagship** and **umbrella** species for the conservation of wild places. Fighting to protect it protects thousands of other species and their habitats.
- b) **The original people** go beyond this; recognizing the species as a powerful symbol spiritually, -- worthy of respect honor and fear. Treating this animal as 'game' is an insult to many Yukon First Nation residents (as well as to many non-First Nation residents.)
- c) **Yukon's special place** in the conservation of grizzlies recognizes the huge **global** responsibility we have as stewards of one of the last areas with healthy populations of the species. Once found across much of the nation they are currently relegated to natural populations in about half of their former range. The species globally is below half its original size and undergoing constant decline; more southern remnant populations are known as "the walking dead".
- d) **Sustainable 'harvest' is probably a myth.** To properly engage in 'sustainable' killing there needs to be a clear understanding of the size of populations, sex and age ratios, natural fecundity, critical and home range habitats – in effect all the parameters affecting population dynamics. It is recognized by virtually all carnivore researchers that these values are extremely difficult and prohibitively expensive to obtain. (There is not even a clear case for the number of genetically isolated gene-pools in Yukon.) The case **against any human killing** is best supported by the preponderance of observations suggesting that grizzlies are classically K-selected – low birth rate, naturally rare on the land, high investment in young etc. – not a committed 'prey' species. There is ample evidence that human killing is by far the most important current force driving grizzly populations toward extinction globally.
- e) **Trophy killing is just plain wrong.** There is no significant tradition of eating grizzly meat and hides serve mostly as wall-hangings: (with bared teeth of all things, -- an attitude that grizzlies virtually never exhibit naturally.) Stacking this wonderfully adapted, naturally fit species against the human animal that wants to make 'game' of the grizzly in the pretense that somehow the 'dangerous' beast was 'selected' for its superior size and then felled in 'fair chase' to a mightier hunter, is just absurd. Its time trophy hunts were banned completely.
- f) **Hunt restrictions** need to be so much more severe for this species that killing them should become a very rare event. Currently hunters are 'requested' to try to shoot only males -- and certainly not females with cubs. The Conservation community needs far more assurance than that. (Prohibitions that dictate for example if a 'mistake' is made,



that hunter or concession holder loses privilege to the hunt completely. Add to this a **complete ban on hunting from public roadways** and from any All-Terrain Vehicles.)

- g) Grizzlies can be dangerous to people and property.** The public must be taught that this is just one of the things that comes along with living in the Yukon. Getting along with bears is a learned skill. Chief among those skills is understanding that an intelligent animal like a bear will take advantage of foolish human behavior where food is involved. Heavy punishment for accidentally or purposefully providing attractants for carnivores of all types needs to be a **very serious offence**.
- h) It is time the Rare and Endangered status of grizzlies is recognized in law.** Federal law recognizes grizzlies as “special concern; a designation that basically means wildlife managers can decide that whatever they are doing is ‘careful’ and ‘special’. A clear case can be made to increase the concern federally to ‘threatened’. Add to this the clear case for the **Yukon to enact an Endangered Species Act of its own**. Depending on the federal statute has basically failed the grizzly; local, regional laws that require local management authority to act are way overdue.
- i) Commitment to conservation of the grizzly will be judged historically** as commitment to preserving biodiversity generally... **or not**
- j) Grizzlies are, probably correctly, labeled Special Concern under SARA.** Habitat fragmentation in the south and east has separated Grizzly populations to the point each of those sub-populations should probably be considered threatened or even endangered. The Yukon therefore needs to ensure Grizzly habitat is conserved and the ultimate goal should be that Grizzlies are raised to “Not At Risk”.