

Tammaqtailinahuarniriit anngutighat atuqhugit Inuit qaujimajatuqangillu ilihmaniillu ilitquhiannin
Conserving wildlife through the application of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and scientific knowledge

March 2nd 2009

The Hon. Jim Prentice
Minister of the Environment
Les Terrasses de la Chaudière
10 Wellington Street
Gatineau, Québec
K1A 0H3

NWMB - SENT e-mail
DATE: mar. 12/09 TS

Dear Mr. Prentice:

Re: The proposed legal listing of the Northwestern Population of Grizzly Bear as a species of special concern under the *Species at Risk Act*

On September 10th 2008, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board (NWMB or Board) held a public hearing in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, for the purpose of publicly considering the proposed legal listing of the northwestern population of grizzly bear as a species of special concern under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). In attendance as parties at the hearing were representatives of the Government of Nunavut's Department of Environment (GN), Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI), the Kivalliq Wildlife Board (KWB), and the communities of Kugluktuk, Bay Chimo, Chesterfield Inlet, Rankin Inlet and Baker Lake, as well as Elders from the Kitikmeot and Kivalliq Regions of Nunavut.¹

On December 3rd 2008, the NWMB held a decision-making meeting in Iqaluit. After having taken into careful account the reliability and persuasiveness of both the written and oral evidence submitted, the NWMB passed the following resolution:

RESOLVED that the NWMB not approve the listing - under the federal Species at Risk Act - of the northwestern population of Grizzly Bear in the Nunavut Settlement Area (NSA) as a species of special concern, because the population within the NSA:

¹ Unfortunately, Environment Canada declined to attend the hearing. Although no formal explanation was provided, the NWMB understands that the Department withdrew on the eve of the hearing because the fall 2008 federal election had been called.

- (a) *Is expanding its range;*
- (b) *Appears to be increasing in numbers; and*
- (c) *Is not currently subject to threats to its habitat or food supply.*

The NWMB hereby forwards that decision to you, Mr. Minister, pursuant to Section 5.3.17 of the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement*.

Evidence and arguments considered:

In making its decision, the NWMB carefully reviewed all of the evidence and arguments presented to it, including the following:

Nunavut grizzly bear population numbers

- (a) The Canadian grizzly bear population is estimated between 26,915+ and 29,150+. The population in Nunavut is unknown, but is probably between 800 and 2,000. The overall population has decreased considerably over time, although it is believed to have been generally stable since 1990 (COSEWIC Status Report (SR), NWMB Grizzly Bear Public Hearing Binder (Binder), Tab 10, p.v).
- (b) The estimate for the Nunavut population "*is a crude **unofficial** estimate*" [emphasis in the original] (SR, Binder, Tab 10, p.40).
- (c) The grizzly bear population in Nunavut is healthy and expanding, and it can be argued that there are about 2,000 bears roaming the Territory (NTI, Binder, Tab 14, p.3).
- (d) No studies have been done to count the number of grizzly bears in Nunavut (Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS), Binder, Tab 8, p.6).
- (e) Forty to fifty years ago, there were almost no encounters with grizzly bears in the Baker Lake area. Today, hunters' cabins and caches are under regular threat from grizzly bears (NTI, Binder, Tab 14, p.1-3).
- (f) Kugluktuk has lived with grizzly bears for thousands of years, but their numbers have increased dramatically during the last decade, and they are becoming a nuisance getting into people's cabins, and even into town (NTI, Binder, Tab 14, p.2).
- (g) The range expansion for grizzly bear in Nunavut appears to be a population increase, not just dispersal. However, the GN does not yet have any research data to support this suggestion (GN, NWMB Grizzly Bear Public Hearing Transcript (Transcript), p.83, lines 18-25).

Number of grizzly bear populations in Canada

- (h) McLoughlin distinguishes 3 populations of grizzly bears in the central Canadian Arctic, but concludes that the population in the Central Arctic should be managed as one contiguous population, and contiguous with adjacent populations outside his study area (SR, Binder, Tab 10, p.7).
- (i) Demographic grizzly bear data, including estimates of population size and trend, specific to individual clades (groups) are not complete enough to determine status of members of those clades. In addition, clade association has not yet been assigned for grizzly bears throughout much of their Canadian distribution, including most of British Columbia and the eastern Arctic, precluding definition of Canadian subpopulations on this basis (SR, Binder, Tab 10, p.7). Accordingly, nearly all Canadian grizzly bears occupy a continuous population unit (SR, Binder, Tab 10, p.72).
- (j) At the time of assessment of the northwestern population of grizzly bears, there wasn't adequate information to prove that the Nunavut population of bears is different than the population in other jurisdictions (GN, Transcript, p.117, line 29, and p.118, lines 1-3).
- (k) The GN views this proposed listing as more than just for a species in Nunavut – it is for the species as a whole, which is what this listing is about (GN, Transcript, p.73, lines 16-19).

Grizzly bear range

- (l) The overall grizzly bear range has contracted significantly since the 1800s (CWS, Binder, Tab 8, p.4).
- (m) Inuit knowledge indicates an eastern range expansion in the Kivalliq Region (GN, Binder, Tab 13, p.1).
- (n) Grizzly bear range is also expanding in the Kitikmeot Region – moving both northward to Victoria Island and eastward (NTI, Transcript, p.128, lines 18-21).

Threats to grizzly bears and their habitat

- (o) Currently, overall habitat appears stable and overall population trends are stable. However, population trends are not accurately monitored, southern habitat is becoming fragmented, and increasing development pressure in the NWT and Nunavut may threaten grizzly bear habitat (CWS, Binder, Tab 8, p.7).

- (p) Threats include hunting (if not managed), habitat loss, road construction and fragmentation of habitat in the south (CWS, Binder, Tab 8, p.8).
- (q) The GN supports the proposed listing of special concern, for the following reasons:
- Increased resource exploration and development on the land and the spread of human activity – leading to a potential increase in bear-human contact, which can lead to an increase in defense-of-life-and-property kills;
 - In terms of life history, grizzly bears are long lived and slow to reproduce, and in Nunavut they start reproducing at a much later age – 8 years;
 - Grizzly bears are susceptible to over-harvest (GN, Binder, Tab 13, page 1).
- (r) Nunavut has a small human population and only pockets of exploration camps. The detrimental impacts seen on the animal in southern Canada have not occurred in Nunavut. Hunting and loss of habitat are not an issue in Nunavut (NTI, Binder, Tab 14, p.3 & 4).
- (s) The bears are coming to the north because their habitat in the south is being destroyed (NTI, Transcript, p.19, lines 4-6).

Hunting grizzly bears in Nunavut

- (t) The current annual harvest limit of 24 bears is considered sustainable. That limit is not enforced by the GN because these are voluntary quantitative restrictions set by the RWOs. The limit of 24 has not been reached in the last eight or ten years, although the GN expects to see an increase in harvests in the future (GN, Binder, Tab 13, p.1; Transcript, p.76, lines 22-26, and p.77, lines 1-3, and p.101, lines 20-26).
- (u) In Nunavut, the harvest is very well monitored, and we account for all kills of grizzly bears (GN, Transcript, p.99, lines 5-8).

Research on grizzly bears

- (v) There have been few research studies of grizzly bear in Nunavut, although the GN is actively involved in conducting and initiating research projects that – combined with Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit – will help to ensure sustainable harvesting and monitoring of the status of Nunavut grizzly bears (GN, Binder, Tab 13, p.1 & 2).
- (w) The GN currently has no data and no ongoing studies in the Kivalliq Region (GN, Transcript, p.82, lines 22-26).

Property damage by grizzly bears

- (x) The GN has staffed a *"wildlife deterrent specialist"* position, and it will be a high priority to work with communities in the Kivalliq around deterrence of grizzly bears (Transcript, p.87, lines 10-12 and lines 19-24).
- (y) *"...cached meat are being eaten by the grizzly bears... I want a solution to manage the grizzly bears..."* (Elder, Transcript, p.21, lines 16-17)
- (y) The damage to cabins is getting out of hand – equipment and cabins are destroyed, and the hunters are not getting any compensation (Elder, Transcript, p.25, lines 11-17).
- (z) *"There are 23 cabins near Rankin Inlet that have been destroyed..."* (HTO, Transcript, p.32, lines 10-12).
- (aa) Inuit need compensation or assistance in renovating cabins destroyed by grizzly bears (member of the public, Transcript, p.148, lines 9-19).

Benefits of listing grizzly bears

- (bb) Among the benefits of listing will be:
 - The development of a National Management Plan - which will involve Nunavut participation - that will benefit management of the population and its long-term viability;
 - Increased funding for research; and
 - New partnerships to benefit the management of the species (GN, Binder, Tab 13, p.2).
- (cc) The GN expects that the National Management Plan would specifically address matters of protection and deterrence of grizzly bears: *"I would expect definitely that the concept of mortality around defence-of-life-and-property kills... would be an integral part of a management plan..."* (Transcript, p.85, lines 8-21 and lines 24-26, and p. 86, lines 1-2).

Conclusions:

In carrying out its deliberations, the NWMB carefully considered the arguments put forward by CWS and the GN that the Board should list grizzly bear as a species of special concern. The NWMB also conscientiously considered the evidence supporting that position – including that the northwestern population of grizzly bear should be considered a continuous population unit, that the overall numbers and range of that

population have decreased considerably over time, that habitat is becoming more fragmented, and that road construction and other development pressure, as well as unmanaged hunting, are increasing threats.

At the same time, and just as carefully and conscientiously, the NWMB considered the arguments and evidence of Inuit living alongside the Nunavut population of grizzly bears. That population is healthy and expanding - indeed, its increase has been nothing short of dramatic in recent years, resulting in a significant rise in property damage and loss of meat caches.

In addition, both the GN and Inuit are clear that grizzly bears are expanding their range in the Kivalliq Region. Inuit are of the view that they are also expanding northward in the Kitikmeot Region. The GN suggests that this grizzly bear range expansion in Nunavut appears to not just be a dispersal, but an actual population increase – although it acknowledges that there is not yet any scientific research data to support this suggestion.

The GN and Inuit are also in agreement that the voluntary harvest limit for grizzly bears in Nunavut is sustainable and, in fact, has not even been reached in the last eight or ten years – and that the harvest is very well monitored, with all kills accounted for.

All parties appear to agree that habitat loss and/or fragmentation, as well as road construction, are threats that are occurring only in the south. While CWS argues that development pressure in Nunavut may threaten grizzly bear habitat, NTI correctly points out that there are only a few pockets of exploration camps in the vast Nunavut grizzly bear range.

Finally, the NWMB took into account that little scientific research has been done on grizzly bears in Nunavut, that virtually no studies have been carried out concerning the number of bears in the territory, that further research is required in order to more confidently determine the number of populations and sub-populations of Canadian grizzly bears, and that Inuit living in the Kitikmeot and Kivalliq Regions collectively hold a significant amount of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit concerning Nunavut grizzly bears.

Based upon a careful consideration of all the arguments and evidence received, the NWMB has concluded that the population of grizzly bears in Nunavut is likely increasing in number, is expanding its range, is being sustainably hunted, and is not currently subject to any identified threats. At the same time, the Board recognizes that grizzly

bears in southern jurisdictions appear to be of special concern, particularly with respect to loss and fragmentation of habitat.

While the NWMB has taken into careful account the risk status of grizzly bears outside the Nunavut Settlement Area, it is of the view that the Nunavut population of grizzly bears is not in peril of becoming a threatened or endangered population because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats. Accordingly, the NWMB has decided not to approve the recommendation from the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada that grizzly bears be listed as a species of special concern under SARA, insofar as that recommendation includes the Nunavut population of grizzly bears.

Minister Prentice, should you have any questions or concerns with respect to this decision or the rationale provided by the NWMB, please do not hesitate to contact the Board.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Harry Flaherty', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

A/Chairperson of the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board

