

SUBMISSION TO THE NWMB
FOR

Information: X

Decision:

Issue: COSEWIC Assessment for Grizzly Bear

Background: The grizzly bear was assessed by COSEWIC in May 2012. The Committee recommended that this species be listed as Special Concern because the distribution of the species has declined by over 50% since the 1800s. Much of the North American range is in Western Canada. There are no signs of the population decreasing currently but the species range is expanding north and the number of populations in the south are declining. Because grizzly bears have a low reproductive rate and there are increased pressures in parts of their range (such as resource extraction), this species could be of greater concern if these pressures are not reversed.

Under SARA, there are no requirements to restrict harvest or regulate habitat for species that are listed as Special Concern. There is a requirement to develop a management plan within 3 years of a species being listed.

Species Description

The grizzly bear also known as the brown bear, is a large, muscular mammal that is found living in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. It also is found in the Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta. They can be distinguished from other bears by the concave, dish-shaped face, large shoulder hump and long claws.

Grizzly bears occur year round and have large home ranges. They occupy a wide variety of habitats ranging from sea level to high alpine environments. In the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, the grizzly bear occurs primarily in alpine or tundra habitats. They eat all kinds of food including plants and animals. They also feed on carcasses left behind from predators or hunters.

In the winter, grizzly bears move into dens where they hibernate for up to seven months. Breeding females give birth to cubs in their dens around January or February. They emerge from their dens in spring as late as early May.

Grizzly bears once ranged across most of western North America and south to Mexico. They disappeared from much of the area following the arrival of Europeans in the 1800s. Populations appear stable across most of the remaining range today however habitat in the southern portion of the range is becoming fragmented and increased development pressures in the north may threaten grizzly bear habitat in the future. Grizzly bears are sensitive to loss of habitat and are slow to recover from declining populations, so COSEWIC determined that a designation as Special Concern was warranted.

Next Steps:

This briefing is the notification of COSEWIC's status assessment of grizzly bear as a species of Special Concern at their May 2012 meeting.

Once COSEWIC has finalized its status and assessment report, which is due in the fall, it will provide this to the Minister of Environment.

Environment Canada's proposed method of consultation will be to send out information packages to Nunavut communities within the range of the grizzly bear to provide information about the assessment and give them an opportunity to provide information/ask questions in advance of working with them to decide whether in person meetings will also be required.

A list of the communities that will be contacted is attached. Copies of the consultation materials will be provided once they are completed (letter, hard copy and CD of powerpoint presentation).

CWS will provide an update to the Board on the final COSEWIC assessment and status report if there are any changes from the information presented in September.

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