



Why the spring bear hunt should end

Description

Governments across this country have long since handed animal care standards to the interests of industry

By **Georges Dupras**

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Due to the return of the **spring bear hunt in Ontario**, people are asking if there exists any research that calls for hunting black bears, and if so, on what is it based.

To my knowledge, there exists no such data. Just because black bears are not a species at risk, and their numbers suggest they can withstand a hunt, this in itself does not constitute a scientific argument for reinstating the hunt, nor is it conservation.

Should the **Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry** in Ontario (The Ministry) be in possession of such scientific data, then this research should be made available to the general public. Let's not forget that the Ministry is accountable to all citizens and not only to consumptive wildlife interests. Should you insist on any supportive research, you will almost certainly be directed to **Freedom of Information**. That said, in lieu of receiving any peer-reviewed science, you will likely receive a letter arguing that wildlife is designated as a resource that can and should be harvested.

Access to information

One popular misunderstanding among Canadians is the area of legal jurisdiction. There are very few federal laws that protect animals in Canada. The cruelty to animals section of the Federal Criminal Code could be used to protect all animals but animal users, and researchers in particular, steadfastly oppose the application of any anti-cruelty laws, preferring their own industry standards and review council. Governments across this country have long surrendered their animal care responsibilities to the interests of industry. Simply put, all agricultural, exotic, wild, and some domestic animals fall under the animal care standards of industry.

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animal users, and researchers in particular, steadfastly oppose the application of any anti-cruelty laws, preferring their own industry standards and review council.

In these cases, you may not have access to industry research beyond data that has been pasteurized for public distribution.

It is to be understood that migratory species and those listed by the Convention for International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) are governed by Federal authorities within Canada. Wildlife on First Nation lands falls under Native Councils or the Elected Chiefs.

Hunting as a conservation tool

Hunting is not a conservation tool; it is a political tool cloaked in so-called science. Wild animals are seen as 'resources,' not sentient beings. The spring bear hunt in Ontario, which had been cancelled by the Conservative party of Ontario in 1999, was re-instated in 2014 by the then Liberal party leader, Premier **Kathleen Wynne**, because, in her own words, she wanted to win the election – science had nothing to do with it.

Regardless, protocols and summaries can be written in such a way as to leave a wide range of interpretations. This can be achieved through the selected use of study disclosures, parameters, terms of reference, funding, time constraints and a touch of personal interest.

True science – science politicized

It is important to recognize true science from science that has been politicized.

True science is defined as the systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world. In essence, scientific research, basic or applied, has for purpose to establish the facts about a subject and, in the case of wildlife, their impact on other dependent species (trickle-down effect).

Science politicized is defined in the same manner but is applied in such a way as to justify political objectives. The true meaning of the word science is in no way consistent with how it is applied by industry (industry standards) or our elected officials.

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Political pundits, among others, promote culls by arguing only those parts of a study that supports their values (cherry-picking), or science that has yet to be peer-reviewed. Animals having little to no capital value* such as: coyotes, mule deer, wolves, cormorants, seals, geese and others; who impact on capital** species such as moose, fish, deer, caribou; who compete for habitat such as wood bison; or who inconvenience humans, are destined for slaughter. As for issues of human safety, the best solutions, such as not building in prime bear habitat in the first instance, or bear-proofing the area as per [Bear Smart](#) or [Bear Wise](#) standards, are obvious but not popular. It is much easier to fall back to the lock & load mentality.

Effective arguments for the layman

I'm occasionally asked what is the most effective way to counter government arguments for promoting wildlife bounties, culls and hunting, even on private property?

Obviously, each case differs but I would suggest that a person begins by living the standards they are



promoting. Personal example will influence where opinions will not. Secondly, I would speak of programs such as Bear Smart and Bear Wise that have proven track records in reducing bear-human incidences. I would refer to the **Mule Deer translocation project** in British Columbia, another non-lethal approach, or the use of **beaver bafflers** to deal with flooding issues. Information regarding these programs is available through the animalalliance.ca

Political biases

Due to our size and demographics, Canada is a challenging country to govern. It doesn't take long for a new-to-the-hill politician to learn how the political game is played. Politics, and not science, dictate survival on the Hill. The Trans Mountain Pipeline and Le Plan du Nord in Northern Quebec are but two examples. MPs soon learn of the influence that marginal or swing ridings have, the exclusivity of the Ministry of Natural Resources, the benefits of compromise and the cost of ignoring party policy.

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There also exist at least two covert parliamentary caucuses in Ottawa to ensure the proper indoctrination of newly-elected MPs. This manner of managing the environment, and wildlife, is not exclusive to Canada and is shared by many other jurisdictions.

As long as animals are designated as resources or property, there is little hope for any significant improvement in their overall care by the industries that exploit them.

Science politicized

Why is there a spring black bear hunt in Ontario? Politics.

If anything, corporate and political rationale, greed as well as pride have shaped our management plans and brought us to where we are today.

Disclaimer: *The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of WestmountMag.ca or its publishers.*

**Species having a capital value include, but are not limited to: the Big 5 in Africa, polar bears, brown bears, cougars, etc.*

***Species having no apparent capital value and designated as vermin include coyotes, seals, wolves, cormorants, wood bison, etc.*

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Georges R. Dupras has advocated for animals for over fifty years. A member of the International Association for Bear Research and Management (IBA), a Director of the Animal Alliance of Canada (AAC), Quebec Representative of Zoocheck Canada and past Board member of the Canadian SPCA, he worked on the original Save the Seal campaign in 1966 that culminated in the founding of the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) in 1969. Georges Dupras has published two books, *Values in Conflict* and the eBook *Ethics, a Human Condition*, and currently lives in Montreal, Canada.



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