



Ontario's government takes
a major step backwards

Description

The province renews the spring bear hunt that will leave countless orphan cubs to perish

By **Georges R. Dupras**

In 1999, after a long-fought battle between animal advocates, hunters, anglers and outfitters from Northern Ontario, as well as increasing pressure from an informed electorate, the government of Ontario banned the spring bear hunt. The ban came into effect after it became obvious that there existed no scientific data to support the need for an activity that left countless orphan cubs to perish, and further skewed black bear population numbers.

Recently, Premier Doug Ford and his Progressive Conservative Government reinstated the spring bear hunt. This he did despite scientific data from the mid-90s stating that the spring bear hunt would leave cubs to die of thirst, exposure, starvation and predation. Added to this evidence is that current population numbers are based on best estimates. These data originate in part from numbers reported by hunters.

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A very high mortality rate

A study was commissioned by the government of Ontario and conducted within specific sectors that had been previously hunted-out. These sectors were chosen because hunters were either no longer familiar with, or had never hunted bears. The report concluded that 70% of orphan cubs would perish within the year their mothers had been killed. Despite professional data stating the spring bear hunt would leave cubs to die of thirst, exposure, starvation and predation, Premier Doug Ford and his Progressive Conservative Government reinstated the spring bear hunt in 2020.

Hunt lacking in science



There exists no true justification calling for the baiting and killing of these bears. There may exist a marginal economic incentive, but the argument of increased bear-human incidents does not add up. The issue of nuisance bears destroying composting and garbage bins is more an issue of people not undertaking their civic responsibilities. The Ministry of Natural Resources in Quebec has admitted that there is no such thing as a nuisance bear, only ignorant people.

Conditioning

Generally, and other than the Canadian Seal Hunt for whitecoats, I know of no government-sanctioned hunts where mother/young dependency still exists. Though hunters argue that they do not hunt females during the spring hunt, experienced woodsmen will admit that it is difficult to identify the gender of a bear in the wild until it is too late, meaning the bear has either been killed or fatally injured only to die somewhere else. The increasing practice of bear baiting by hunters, and in some cases eco-tour operators (many of whom are also hunters), also conditions and de-sensitizes bears. Bear baiting only exacerbates the issue of gender identification due to hunter placement (vantage point) and the likelihood that the animal will not stand over the bait, thus exposing its genitalia for easier identification.

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These bears, often lactating females, are conditioned by irresponsible citizens to approach and enter residential areas. This is accomplished by municipalities and individuals who are unwilling to recognize and deal with attractants that lure hungry animals close to communities. These attractants include: open garbage disposal areas, non-bear resistant composting and garbage bins, unclean BBQs, bird feeders, a variety of berry-bearing bushes, and mountain ash trees planted close to dwellings.

Complaints from residents

As for complaints about the cost of bear-proofing rural communities, it might be wise to remember that humans have invaded bear habitat, not the reverse. Hunters claim to be "conservationists", a claim that has no bearing in fact. The use of dogs in hunting bears is another area of extreme cruelty and is presently being considered by the Ford administration.

Un-recorded losses

It is common practice for a lactating female to hide her cubs up a tree some distance from where she forages. If this female is killed, having been attracted to a baiting site, or chased by dogs, her cubs will also perish. Given that the average female has two cubs, and that the hunter may well be reluctant to admit his mistake, any figures emanating from the government must be accepted with reservation. In 1998, the Ministry of Natural Resources in Ontario stated that the spring bear hunt resulted in the loss of 274 cubs a year. All things considered, in the case of the spring bear hunt, we are dealing with politicized management based on wishful thinking.

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Spring bear hunt abolished January 15, 1999

Even if there were substantive evidence supporting the argument of increased bear-human incidences, this would not, in itself, justify a spring bear hunt. There are proven programs in place to protect communities from conditioned bears. In Ontario, [Bear With Us](#), a long-standing non-lethal bear management centre, has such a program available for communities.

Political conservation

This politically motivated initiative by Ontario's Progressive Conservative government is a clear example of political conservation. It has nothing to do with real conservation, has no basis in science and counters efforts to change deep-rooted prejudices about bears. Re-active conservation, such as we have today, only serves to perpetuate a myth.

If you are concerned about this significant step backwards, I urge you to contact Premier Doug Ford's government, before February 18 of this year at the following link: ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1112

As a second choice, you might wish to contact him using his email address at premier@ontario.ca

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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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