



## GRIZZLY BEAR FOUNDATION

### DARK DAYS AHEAD FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA'S GRIZZLY BEARS

**VANCOUVER – March 7, 2017** – A report issued today by the Board of Inquiry appointed by the recently formed Grizzly Bear Foundation states that the long term survival of grizzly bears in British Columbia is threatened from a loss of habitat and food sources, as well as the government-sanctioned trophy hunt.

The three person Board of Inquiry's members include Michael Audain and Stuart McLaughlin of West Vancouver and Suzanne Veit of Victoria. In September 2016 they launched public hearings held in Cranbrook, Prince George, Fort Nelson, Prince Rupert, Vancouver and Victoria, as well as receiving advice from many biologists and bear specialists. The Board of Inquiry's 92 page report contains 19 recommendations directed to all levels of government as well as program priorities for the Grizzly Bear Foundation.

"Grizzly bears have lived in our province for at least 50,000 years", says Inquiry Chairman Michael Audain. "But unless we take serious steps now to secure their wilderness home from encroachment by human activities and protect their food sources from the impact of climate change, in a few decades the bears may disappear".

Audain advised that the Inquiry was impressed that British Columbians really seem to care about their grizzly bears. They recognize that these magnificent creatures now only have sustainable populations in the mountains of British Columbia and Alaska, whereas at one time they roamed all over the western and central areas of North America. Biologists call the grizzly bear a keystone species as where the bears thrive the environment is also healthy.

While grizzly hunting is still practised by a small minority of the British Columbia population as well as a number of foreign hunters, the vast majority of urban and rural British Columbians would prefer to see the trophy hunt terminated, especially as grizzly bear watching activities are flourishing and attracting a great many international tourists.

The abolition of the trophy hunt is also supported by most of British Columbia's First Nations who have shared deep cultural and spiritual relationships with the bears for thousands of years. As the First Nations gain control of their ancestral lands, the Inquiry anticipates that they will become more active in bear-viewing tourism given the potential this can have for employment opportunities.

The provincial government takes the position that the trophy hunt is sustainable in maintaining a population of around 15,000 grizzly bears, but the Inquiry 's members wonder whether the pain and suffering that the bears experience is worth it, especially in terms of the relatively modest revenue that the hunt generates when compared to the growing interest in grizzly-viewing tourism.

The interactions between grizzly bears and human settlements was of particular interest to the Inquiry, since the bears invariably end up the losers. But, as there is now much experience about how bears and people can peacefully co-exist in rural areas, this is something that the Inquiry recommends be broadly disseminated.

“When we embarked on this Inquiry, I was under the impression that the main threat to the survival of the grizzly bears was the annual trophy hunt”, said Audain. “While termination of the hunt is clearly essential, grizzly bears face even greater threats from burgeoning human encroachment into their habitat, as well as the loss of essential foods including wild salmon and huckleberries. There are dark days ahead for the province’s grizzly bears if British Columbians are unwilling to address these issues and ensure that the bears have a secure home in our province”.

“There is nothing wrong with hunting wildlife for food on a sustainable basis and, indeed, hunters have played an important role in conservation activities to maintain this opportunity, but it seems that the great majority of British Columbians will no longer countenance hunters shooting grizzly bears just to mount their heads or pelts on a trophy wall. As a society, I believe that we have grown beyond that”, commented Stuart McLaughlin.

Suzanne Veit added, “The cumulative impacts of habitat loss, insecure food sources, inadequate enforcement of wildlife laws, legal hunting, and the as yet uncertain impacts of climate change combine to present major challenges to the survival of the grizzly bears. Strong action is needed now to secure their future. How we achieve this will be judged by the world”.

The full report is available to view at <https://grizzlybearfoundation.com/pages/reports>

### **About Grizzly Bear Foundation**

The Grizzly Bear Foundation, based in Vancouver, is Canada’s only charity solely dedicated to the long term welfare of grizzly bears. It supports the conservation of grizzlies through research and public education.

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Instagram: @grizzlybearfdn  
Facebook: Grizzly Bear Fdn  
Website: grizzlybearfoundation.com

**Board of Inquiry**

Michael Audain, Vancouver, Chairman of Polygon Homes Ltd.

Stuart McLaughlin, West Vancouver, business executive and  
Chairman of BC Pavilion Corporation

Suzanne Veit, Victoria, retired British Columbia government deputy minister

Media Inquiries To:

**GRIZZLY BEAR FOUNDATION**

Michael J. Audain  
Chairman  
Ph: 604-877-1131  
maudain@polyhomes.com

Rachel S. Forbes  
Executive Director  
Ph: 604-871-4263  
rforbes@grizzlybearfoundation.com



## **GRIZZLY BEAR FOUNDATION**

### **BACKGROUNDER**

From the Board of Inquiry's 92 page report there are 19 recommendations directed to all levels of government as well as program priorities for the Grizzly Bear Foundation.

#### **Summary of Recommendations**

The Board of Inquiry has embarked on this journey determined to learn what the grizzly bears of our province require in the short and long term to enjoy a secure future. As noted in the introduction, we have learned a great deal about these bears and the threats to their well-being. We are extremely grateful for the time, effort and expertise that so many people and organizations have contributed to our Inquiry. The work that is being done by numerous community-based organizations to support grizzly bear populations is impressive and much needed. The Grizzly Bear Foundation looks forward to working collaboratively with these organizations to achieve our common goal of securing the future of grizzly bears.

The Grizzly Bear Foundation's education, conservation and research contributions to this effort can now get started. We have proposed several recommendations to guide the Foundation's work. Upon approval of the Foundation's Board of Directors, some initiatives will begin immediately, others will be implemented in phases as funding becomes available.

Grizzly bears in our province face substantial threats. We fear for the future of the bears unless all levels of government take a stronger leadership role in securing their future.

#### **Recommendations to the Grizzly Bear Foundation**

##### **Education**

1. Prepare, publish and distribute material for elementary school children about grizzly bears in BC. Solicit the collaboration of educational experts, bear biologists, illustrators and appropriate school curriculum officials.
2. Formulate and deliver a demonstration project to highlight the use of electric fences and bear spray in strategic locations. Do so in partnership with an existing local coexistence organization. Develop and circulate a Best Practices Guide on the basis of this work.

## **Conservation**

3. Facilitate a forum with First Nations to consider potential partnership initiatives to secure the status and future of grizzly bears.
4. Launch an outreach program to strengthen knowledge-sharing amongst those engaged in grizzly bear-focused activities throughout BC. Augment the knowledge base about what can best secure the future of the province's grizzly bears. Report back to the public annually about the most effective initiatives across the province.
5. Solicit a partnership with a major forestry company. Reach an understanding of the needs and issues the forestry industry faces in terms of access planning. Demonstrate how logging and grizzly bear protection can both be accommodated. Develop and circulate a Best Practices Guide on the basis of this work.

## **Research**

6. Appoint a research advisory committee to identify knowledge gaps and formulate future research priorities for the Grizzly Bear Foundation.
7. In collaboration with recreation groups, clubs and commercial operators, undertake a study regarding the impact of access to the backcountry and propose strategies for the protection of sensitive grizzly bear habitat.
8. Explore the establishment of a BC university-based institute that will cultivate a repository of grizzly bear research and make it available to the public.
9. Conduct a study of potential new grizzly bear viewing opportunities across BC, in collaboration with a bear biologist and a representative of the bear viewing industry.
10. Support efforts to address attractants at the local level by producing a Model Bylaw Toolkit that governments can tailor for implementation in their own municipality or region.

## **Recommendations to the Federal Government**

11. Expand the Guardian program to more interested First Nation communities, including supporting them if they wish to develop ecotourism infrastructure such as accommodations.
12. Salmon provide extremely important nutrient subsidies to terrestrial plant and animal communities, including grizzly bears. In preparing its implementation plan for the Wild Salmon Policy, we recommend that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans explicitly consider in its allocation formula the nutritional needs of grizzly bears, a keystone species in the predator-scavenger complex that uses and distributes marine nutrients.

### **Recommendations to the Provincial Government**

13. Terminate all hunting of grizzly bears in BC.
14. Regulate the bear viewing industry in consultation with representatives of this industry.
15. Renew and update the 1995 British Columbia Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy, and determine the human and financial resources necessary to implement the Strategy. Include a comprehensive public consultation.
16. Strengthen Provincial wildlife enforcement capability and increase actions that proactively encourage compliance with wildlife protection laws.

### **Recommendations to BC Local & Regional Governments**

17. Institute measures to reduce attractants in public spaces and parks.
18. Work to increase the number of communities that are pursuing Bear Smart status.
19. Introduce and enforce bylaws regarding attractants.

### **Media Inquiries To:**

#### GRIZZLY BEAR FOUNDATION

Michael J. Audain  
Chairman  
Ph: 604-877-1131  
maudain@polyhomes.com

Rachel S. Forbes  
Executive Director  
Ph: 604-871-4263  
[rforbes@grizzlybearfoundation.com](mailto:rforbes@grizzlybearfoundation.com)

Twitter, Instagram, Facebook: @grizzlybearfdn  
Website: grizzlybearfoundation.com