



photo by Ian McAllister

# Ban the trophy hunt in the Great Bear Rainforest

**On April 1, the BC government opened the trophy hunt of bears in the Great Bear Rainforest. The genetically distinct Haida black bear is being targeted, as is the monarch of the rainforest – the grizzly.**

**I**RONICALLY, bears were recently celebrated at the 2010 winter Olympics in Vancouver. We saw pictures of grizzlies and black bears on posters and murals all over Vancouver and a huge, white Spirit bear was featured in the opening ceremonies. Bears are embedded in Canadian culture and society. They symbolize our natural world that we are so blessed with and they also remind us of the vast, wild areas that Canada is known for. Yet this spring, BC made another terrible decision in its controversial and checkered history of bear management.

On April 1, the BC government opened the trophy hunt of bears in the Great Bear Rainforest. The genetically distinct Haida black bear is being targeted as is the monarch of the rainforest – the grizzly. Even the coastal black bear that carries the recessive gene that produces the pure white bear, or Spirit bear, can legally be killed in 98 percent of its genetic range.

As bears just begin to wake up from their long, winter hibernation and move to lower elevation sedge meadows in search of the protein-rich plants, “sport” hunters will be waiting, hiding in blinds with high-powered rifles, ready to take home a lifeless trophy.

Approximately 300 grizzly bears are killed as trophies every year in BC. This sad statistic puts the lie to

the provincial government’s own description of grizzlies as “perhaps the greatest symbol of the wilderness” whose “survival will be the greatest testimony to our environmental commitment.”

While British Columbia supports one of the greatest diversity of bears in the world, our government, however, continues to treat bears as an expendable resource. The science behind the population estimates, upon which annual harvest rates are based, is flawed; arguments in support of bear hunting are based on false assumptions about the economic importance of the hunt. And clearly, a growing number of people believe it is time to end the trophy hunt before these animals are pushed to the brink of extinction or extirpated as they have been elsewhere in the continent.

Hunting for subsistence makes sense, but the trophy hunt is about something entirely different. It is about gratuitous greed and perverse pleasure – simply to put a trophy on the wall.

The trophy hunting of bears is culturally unacceptable – a practice we will look back on with shame. First Nations on this coast find killing animals for pleasure or sport culturally abhorrent and so do the vast majority of British Columbians.

Bears are sentient, intelligent animals and they should not be killed indiscriminately as trophies for hunters’ walls. This practice is an anachronism and when it is banned, it simply won’t be missed. It’s that simple.

**\*** Visit [pacificwild.org](http://pacificwild.org) to find out how to protect BC bears. Also visit the David Suzuki Foundation, [david Suzuki.org](http://david Suzuki.org)

by Ian McAllister, executive director, Pacific Wild

## Natural history

**T**o understand why grizzlies are at the centre of a controversial wildlife management issues, it is at first necessary to examine their natural history.

The biology of grizzly bears makes them at once beautiful and intriguing, yet also particularly vulnerable to sport hunting and habitat loss. Their reproductive rate is one of the lowest of any land animal in North America. Females don’t produce their first litter until reaching sexual maturity at between five and eight years of age and their litters rarely exceed four cubs. Intervals between births can be as long as three years and cubs remain attached to the mother for between two and three years.

Male grizzlies have massive ranges, as large as 4,000 square kilometres, making them extremely susceptible to habitat fragmentation through resource extraction and road building. In this light, sport hunting can have a critically detrimental impact; because grizzlies reproduce slowly, they also recover slowly from human induced mortality.

Furthermore, the use of boats, trucks and blinds to stalk bears, as well as the practice of baiting of bears, has, in some cases, created a modern hunt that is too efficient, tipping the balance dangerously in favour of humans.