

**MINISTRY OF FORESTS, LANDS AND NATURAL RESOURCE OPERATIONS**  
**INFORMATION NOTE**

Date: December 11, 2015

File: 280-20/2015

CLIFF: 219103

**PREPARED FOR:** Honourable Steve Thomson, Minister of Forest Lands and Natural Resource Operations

**ISSUE:** Year two of a five-year Wolf Management Plan for Caribou

**BACKGROUND:**

Successful recovery of some endangered caribou populations requires intensive removal of wolves, including shooting from helicopters in during the winter season. Governments commitment to recover caribou populations is stated in the Mountain Caribou Recovery Implementation Plan (MCRIP) and the Peace Northern Caribou Plan (PNCP). The Provincial Grey Wolf Management Plan (Wolf Plan) supports active reduction of localized wolf populations to reduce unsustainable predation on wildlife in peril. When the Wolf Plan was approved, ministry staff were directed to develop a five year implementation plan to identify where, when, and how wolves will be controlled to recover specific wildlife populations threatened by predation.

Consistent with the Wolf Plan and the caribou plans, proactive wolf control will be conducted this winter on two critically at peril caribou herd ranges (South Peace, South Selkirk). These herds have the most pressing conservation need, have partner support, are technically sound and are operationally feasible. s.13

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**DISCUSSION:**

The second year of a five year program of aerial wolf removal in the South Selkirk and South Peace treatment areas will start as soon as weather conditions enable safe and efficient operations. Results from the first year of aerial wolf removal are attached. Aerial shooting of wolves is essential to achieve governments recovery goals for caribou. Failure to do so will result in the loss of some caribou herds, reduced effectiveness of certain management trials (e.g. maternal penning), and compromise recovery goals. s.13

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In the South Selkirk, successful predator management is integral to maintain caribou on the landscape and to deliver on expectations of the MCRIP as well as the National Recovery Strategy for Southern Mountain Caribou. The current declining status of caribou populations is a consistent comment from First Nations in consultation efforts. Many First Nations, the Guide-Outfitters Association of BC, and

the BC Trappers Association support controlling wolf predation by wolf removal. Certain segments of the public will oppose shooting of wolves from a helicopter.

## CONCLUSION:

While aerial wolf removal is controversial, s.13

The two continuing removal projects are technically sound and have strong stakeholder support. A communication plan is in place to address comments from those opposed to killing wolves. Removal activities will restart this winter as soon as field conditions (fresh snow cover) permit efficient operations.

## Attachments: Summary of Year one Aerial Wolf Removal - 2015

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## **Attachment: Summary of Year 1 Aerial Wolf Removal - 2015**

- Successful recovery of endangered caribou populations requires intensive removal of wolves, including shooting from helicopters during the winter season.
- The Provincial Grey Wolf Management Plan outlines a comprehensive strategy for managing wolves in BC. The Wolf Plan supports active reduction of localized wolf populations to reduce unsustainable predation on wildlife in peril.
- The South Selkirk caribou population is at high risk of local extinction and meets technical criteria for aerial wolf removal. This caribou herd has gone from 46 animals in 2009 to 27 in 2012 to 14 animals present day. Evidence points to wolves being the leading cause of mortality.
- On January 15, 2015 an aerial wolf removal was started in the South Selkirk herd area. The goal was to remove up to 24 wolves from three packs.
- All wolves in the Boundary Lake pack and two of three Midgely packs have been killed and carcasses recovered. Four other packs each have a collared individual and are being monitored. The collar data indicates that the territories of two of these four packs do not include caribou habitat so those two packs will not be targeted.
- A total of 11 wolves were removed; nine eliminating one pack, and two from a second pack.
- Also starting January 15, 2015, aerial removal began on five caribou herds in the South Peace with the goal to remove 120-160 wolves over the 2014/15 winter.
- Since approval, the area has experienced periods of unseasonably warm weather and little snow which has constrained flying. Subsequently good operational conditions returned and by the end of the project a total of 73 wolves have been removed, primarily from the Moberly and Quintette caribou herd areas.
- Both programs suspended operations on March 31, 2015.
- There are no plans to implement a general aerial wolf cull, and in fact, the Two Zone Strategy noted in the Wolf Management Plan would not support a general cull.
- Wolf populations are plentiful and not a species of concern in BC. Other methods of removing wolves in caribou areas, such as increased hunting opportunities and trapping have not been successful.

# MINISTRY OF FORESTS, LANDS AND NATURAL RESOURCE OPERATIONS

## INFORMATION NOTE

Date: January 4, 2016  
CLIFF: 219318

**PREPARED FOR: Honourable Steve Thomson, Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations**

**ISSUE:** HUNTING REGULATION PROPOSALS FOR GRIZZLY BEARS AND WOLVES IN THE NORTHEAST (REGION 7B) HAVE RECEIVED A HEAVY VOLUME OF RESPONSE.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Northeast staff have submitted a suite of proposals for consideration by the Minister for inclusion in the 2016-18 hunting regulation synopsis. Two proposed changes have received significant attention:

- Increase the Range of Authorizations (ROA) for grizzly bear Limited Entry Hunt (LEH) permits in the Kechika (MU 7-52) and;
- Remove the bag limit and closed season for wolves throughout the Northeast.

All proposed hunting regulations are posted to the public in November and a Provincial Hunting and Trapping Advisory Committee provides specific feedback on the proposals in January. The Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations will decide which proposals proceed in February or March so that new LEH Synopsis can be published in April and the hunting regulations can be published before July 1.

Before hunting regulation changes are proposed, regional staff evaluate what is known about the populations in the area, including historic hunting success. Regulation changes are proposed that are based on conservation objectives for the species and provincial management plans where they exist.

### **DISCUSSION:**

#### **Grizzly Bear Proposal**

The estimated population of grizzly bears in Management Unit 7-52 is 500, which regional staff and local stakeholders consider to be a very conservative estimate. Currently, grizzly bears are hunted under LEH and quota. Average harvest of grizzly bears within this unit since 2001 has been 8 bears per year, which is 1.7% of the estimated population. The allowable harvest of grizzly bears is estimated at 4.7% or 22 bears per year. In general, hunters take a grizzly bear while they are hunting other animals (elk, moose, sheep) in the area. In general less than 20% of the hunters who receive a permit actually take a bear, often because they don't actually go hunting at all.

This area is very remote with very few or no roads. The provincial allocation policy targets a split of 60/40 (ie. guide outfitters would harvest 40%). However, guide outfitters harvest more grizzlies than residents. Residents are not achieving the target level of harvest in large part because the area is so remote and in part because some hunters who wish to hunt do not receive an authorization through the LEH system.

The grizzly bear proposal would increase the number of LEH permits the Director of Fish and Wildlife (DOFW) may issue from 50 to 150. If the increase is approved, the DOFW would issue LEH permits within that range so that the sustainable harvest level could be achieved. Based on historic numbers, the target number of LEH permits would probably be less than a hundred.

## **Wolf Proposal**

The proposal is to allow wolf hunting year around in the northeast region with no bag limit. Currently, above 1100m in elevation, the season runs from August 1 to June 15 with an annual bag limit of three. Below 1100m (i.e. within the region's agricultural belt) there is no closed season. Historically, the wolf harvest in the northeast has averaged around 300 and the populations are healthy. First Nations and hunters in the region report significant increases in wolf populations in the region and have requested additional predator hunting opportunities.

This proposal is likely to have little overall impact on wolf harvest success and would pose no risk to the overall populations in the region. This proposal is not a "wolf cull". The benefit of the proposed change would be to:

- Allow for increased hunting opportunity
- Allow the few proficient wolf hunters to be more effective and perhaps assist in caribou and moose management objectives; and
- Allow ranchers and land owners to be able to address their own predation problems with a hunting licence and not involve costly programs.

Both proposals are well within parameters of sound science and conservation. Opposition to these proposals appears to be based on opposition to any hunting of these species, and not on the appropriate level of sustainable management. Treaty 8 consultation is ongoing.  
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## **NEXT STEPS:**

- The public consultation period for these proposals was to close on December 31, 2015, but due to technical issues has been extended to January 31, 2016.
- The Minister will consider the proposals and any public feedback and make a decision in February or March.

## **Attachments:**

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Ref: 219318

January 20, 2016

Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations

### **Hunting Regulation Proposals for Grizzly Bears and Wolves in the Northeast**

After review of harvest and population data, Northeast staff have submitted a suite of hunting regulation proposals. Two proposed changes have received significant attention:

- Increase the Range of Authorizations (ROA) for grizzly bear Limited Entry Hunt (LEH) permits in the Kechika (MU 7-52) and;
- Remove the bag limit and closed season for wolves throughout the Northeast.

#### **Grizzly Bear Proposal**

- Population of grizzly bears in Management Unit 7-52 is 500, which regional staff and local stakeholders consider to be a very conservative estimate.
- Average harvest of grizzly bears within this unit since 2001 has been 8 bears per year, which is 1.7% of the estimated population. The allowable harvest of grizzly bears is estimated at 4.7% or 22 bears per year.
- The grizzly bear proposal would increase the number of LEH permits the Director of Fish and Wildlife may issue from 50 to 150 but it is not a tripling of authorizations or harvest. If the increase is approved, the Director would issue LEH permits within that range so that the sustainable harvest level could be achieved. The estimated number of permits would likely be 100 per year.

#### **Wolf Proposal**

- The proposal is to allow wolf hunting year around in the northeast region with no bag limit. Historically, the wolf harvest by hunters (this does not affect trapping) in the Northeast has averaged around 300 annually.
- First Nations and stakeholders in the region report significant increases in wolf populations in the region and have requested additional predator hunting opportunities.
- This proposal is not a “wolf cull” but is complementary to larger predator management strategies underway in parts of the region to conserve caribou and manage livestock predation.

#### **NEXT STEPS:**

Due to technical issues with the public consultation website, the public consultation period for these proposals has been extended to January 31, 2016. The Minister will consider the proposals and any public feedback and make a decision in February or March.

**MINISTRY OF FORESTS, LANDS AND NATURAL RESOURCE OPERATIONS**  
**INFORMATION NOTE**

Date: January 25, 2016

File: 280-20

CLIFF: 219846

**PREPARED FOR: Honourable Steve Thomson, Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations**

**ISSUE:** Trend Analysis of South Rockies Grizzly Bear Populations

**BACKGROUND:**

In spring of 2015, a panel of 3 independent bear scientists (2 from Alberta, 1 from Minnesota) was contracted to review grizzly bear harvest management in British Columbia. The intent of the review was to provide the province with an unbiased analysis of current harvest management practices. A draft report has been provided to the province.

One of the recommendations provided by the panel appears to have an immediate bearing on the province's approach to grizzly bear harvest management:

*"Although BC has invested heavily in producing reliable population estimates, few cases exist where these data have been used to examine population trend."*

After the final report was provided to the province new population trend analysis became available indicating grizzly bear populations in the South Rockies portions of the Kootenay Region have been experiencing a decline. The South Rockies Grizzly Bear Population Unit (GBPU) is one of the most intensively studied grizzly bear populations in the province.

DNA based population studies of grizzly bears in the South Rockies GBPU have been conducted from 2006 to present. The original study design was to estimate trends in grizzly bear populations using open mark-recapture (OMR) statistical analysis; this analysis uses data from multiple years and is considered the most precise method to estimate trend.

In response to requests from stakeholders and wildlife managers for allocation of harvest opportunities, data from the study has also been used to estimate population size using spatial mark-recapture (SMR) statistical analysis. This analysis uses data from each year independently and is not as precise as the OMR analysis for estimating trend. The most recent SMR analysis in 2011 estimated a population of 339, with a lower limit of 236 and an upper limit of 442.

From 2006 to 2015, harvest management of grizzly bears in the South Rockies GBPU was based on a population estimate of 301 or 339. These estimates were derived from past DNA-based SMR analyses.

In 2015, a PhD student, supervised by regional wildlife staff, ran an OMR trend analysis on 2006-2013 South Rockies GBPU data to estimate population trend. Findings indicate that this population declined since 2007 and is now estimated at 170 bears (~50% decline).

A recent separate analysis using Statistical Population Reconstruction (SPR) of Compulsory Inspection grizzly bear mortality data and hunter statistics suggests that habitat related factors may be

contributing to moderate population fluctuations in other parts of the Kootenays. However, population declines within the South Rockies GBPU are likely due to a combination of habitat related factors and high human caused mortality rates.

The South Rockies GBPU has had among the highest human caused grizzly bear mortality rates in BC. The area was closed to hunting in the spring of 2011. Based on monitoring data suggesting a stable population, part of the unit was re-opened in the spring of 2013 and the remainder was re-opened in the spring of 2014.

## **DISCUSSION:**

The province has provided the trend analysis report and the SPR to the Grizzly Bear Science Panel to gauge their interest in revising the draft report. The panel has indicated that, based on the new information, revisions to the draft report are required.

The short term management option available for the South Rockies GBPU involves reducing human-caused mortality. Region 4 only has grizzly bear hunts in the spring (i.e., no fall hunt). For the South Rockies GBPU the tentative number of Limited Entry Hunting authorizations available to hunters for the spring 2016 hunt has been set to the minimum (i.e., one per hunt).

Continued monitoring of grizzly bear population trend is important because biologists need to know when and why the decline ends, and recovery begins, and what factors may be contributing to population fluctuations, to enable predictions in the future.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The province is prepared to accept a final report from the scientific review once the panel has had an opportunity to review the new information and revise their current draft. Once a final report is available the province will develop a response and action plan to address the recommendations.

The province will continue to use the best available science to manage wildlife. New information provides wildlife managers with a better understanding of grizzly bear population dynamics. Continued research and additional resources to monitor grizzly bear populations and trends would greatly benefit the harvest management of the species.

Staff in the Kootenay Region are monitoring these populations and are considering further management actions for the spring of 2017.

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**MINISTRY OF FORESTS, LANDS AND NATURAL RESOURCE OPERATIONS  
INFORMATION NOTE**

Date: January 30, 2015  
File: 280-20  
Cliff: 212062

**PREPARED FOR: Honourable Minister Thomson, Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, Minister Rustad, Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, Minister Bennett, Ministry of Energy and Mines and Minister Polak, Ministry of Environment**

**ISSUE:** Endorsement to move forward with revised permitting strategy for Site C

**BACKGROUND:**

On October 14, 2014, the responsible provincial ministers issued an Environmental Assessment Certificate to BC Hydro for Site C, and at the same time the federal government approved the project.

On December 16, 2014, the Premier announced the Financial Investment Decision (FID) to proceed with the project. This announcement revised the construction start date for Site C to the summer 2015, from January 2015, and adjusted the projected total capital cost of Site C upward accordingly from \$7.9 billion to \$8.335 billion, plus a project reserve of \$440 million to be held by Treasury Board.

On Dec 4, 2014, the Ministers of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (FLNRO), Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation (MARR) and Energy and Mines (MEM), met with the Chiefs of four Treaty 8 First Nations - West Moberly, Doig River, Prophet River and Saulteau First Nations. During that meeting the Ministers and Chiefs agreed that the province would enter into negotiations for a custom consultation process for applications related to Site C. Minister Thomson followed up on behalf of his colleagues with a January 14, 2015, letter that stated his expectation was that an agreement would be reached by February 15, 2015.

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This note provides an update on Site C permitting and is seeking endorsement to proceed with First Nations consultation using standard processes to achieve the target construction start date. The key areas of focus of this note are:

- Revised timelines for Site C construction;
- Judicial Reviews of the Site C Environmental Assessment decisions;
- Impact Benefit Agreements Update; and
- The permitting and First Nations consultation and negotiations.

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## **DISCUSSION:**

### ***Revised Timelines***

Discussions with BC Hydro since the FID announcement indicate that they are now targeting late June 2015, to initiate construction activities, pending issuance of permits. The permitting schedule has been revised to align with BC Hydro's new anticipated construction start date.

### ***Judicial Reviews***

Since the Environmental Assessment (EA) decision for Site C, 4 legal challenges have been filed against the Federal EA decision made by the Federal Minister of Environment, and 2 legal challenges have been filed against the Provincial EA Certificate decision. The challenges brought in the BC Supreme Court have been made by three Treaty 8 First Nations (Prophet River, West Moberly and McLeod Lake), as well as the Peace Valley Landowners Association that would be directly impacted by construction of Site C. **s.14**

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In the First Nation judicial reviews, included in the relief sought by the petitioners are:

- i) an interlocutory injunction preventing the Ministers from issuing any permits or authorizations, or taking any other action for the purpose of enabling the Project to proceed, and, if the Ministers do issue such permits or authorizations that they be quashed or set aside; and
- ii) an interlocutory injunction enjoining BC Hydro from performing any work pursuant to the Certificate until the petition is heard by the Court.

As it is now anticipated that the substance of the legal challenges will not be heard and determined prior to BC Hydro's proposed start date in June 2015,

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### ***Impact Benefit Agreements Update***

Impact Benefit Agreement (IBA) negotiations continue between BC Hydro and Treaty 8 First Nations. These negotiations are occurring between BC Hydro and Sauleau, Blueberry, Halfway River First Nations, Doig River First Nation as well as McLeod Lake Indian Band. **s.17**

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In addition, offers for capacity development agreements have been made to Duncan's, Horse Lake and Dene Tha First Nations. MARR, FLNRO and MEM continue to support these discussions; however no agreements have been reached to date.

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BC Hydro Chief Executive Officer, Jessica McDonald, has also initiated work on improving relations between First Nations and BC Hydro in the Northeast. To date, Ms McDonald has met with Doig River, Saulteau and McLeod Lake.

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***Permitting and First Nations Consultation update***

Prior to the FID, FLNRO was prepared to proceed with decisions on several applications related to initial site preparation activities and was poised to initiate consultations on other applications required for primary construction of the project. The Ministers' direction was to engage in negotiations of a custom consultation process for both bundles of permits.

Following the Dec 4, 2014, meeting between the Ministers and Treaty 8 Chiefs, negotiation meetings between the province and First Nations have occurred in January and are scheduled for early February. s.13

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### **1 - Bundle 1 Construction Permits**

This package includes tenures under the *Land Act*, *Forest Act*, *Water Act*, and *Wildlife Act* to facilitate timber removal and site preparation activities at the dam site area. Anticipated timelines and milestones for Bundle 1 applications are as follows:

- Feb 23 to March 23, 2015: extended consultation comment period for bundle 1 applications (30 days);
- March 24 to April 1, 2015: Consultation Summaries and 21 day letters to First Nations (21 days);
- April 14, 2015: consultation complete;
- April 14 to April 23, 2015: Preparation of Statutory Decision Maker (SDM) Recommendations (10 days);
- April 24 to May 3, 2015: SDM Decisions & Rationales (10 days); and
- May 5 to May 19, 2015: Permit issuance process for *Land Act*, *Forest Act*, *Water Act* and *Wildlife Act* (10 days)

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### **2 - Bundle 2 Construction Permits**

These applications are required to initiate primary dam construction of Site C. These applications include:

- Water License for diversion and Storage of water, as well as construction of the dam; and
- *Land Act*, *Forest Act*, *Water Act* and *Mines Act* permits for several project quarries and gravel pits

Estimated timing (140 days) and target dates for permitting and First Nations Consultation for this bundle of applications are as follows:

- Feb 23, 2015 – Initiate consultation on Bundle 2 applications by referral of applications and information to First Nations - anticipate 90 day consultation process;
- May 22, 2015 - Mail out of Consultation Summary and 21 day letter;
- June 11, 2015 – Complete Consultation;
- June 11 to 19, 2015 - Finalization of bundle decision package and consultation report;
- June 19, 2015 - Referral of decision package to SDM's;
- June 30, 2015 – Decisions; and
- June 30 to July 15, 2015 – permit issuance process

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### **3 - *Heritage Conservation Act* Site Alteration Permit**

BC Hydro requires a Site Alteration Permit from FLNRO's Archeology Branch for the entire footprint of the Site C Project. Due to the large number and concentration of archeological sites within the project footprint, this permit is required before BC Hydro can initiate any substantial works with ground disturbance on the project. There is an existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for *Heritage Conservation Act* authorizations under the Treaty 8 Economic Benefits Agreement. The MOU currently specifies a consultation timeframe that allows for a 30 day comment period. Consultation on this application will be able to proceed in late February 2015, resulting in consultation completing at the end of March with decisions being able to be made in April 2015.

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### **NEXT STEPS**

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- MARR and FLNRO proceed with consultation as outlined above – (Feb –June 2015)
  - **Attachments:**
    - January 14, 2015, Letter from Minister Thomson to Treaty 8
    - Site C permitting timelines Gant Chart
- s.13

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