



PROJECT OUTLINES

RATIONALE: Although the actuality of biodiversity loss is global addressing that loss of biodiversity must be local. Human caused habitat transformation, harvest and industrial development are proven to have caused significant loss of keystone species along the eastern foothills of the Rockies and elsewhere in Alberta. Particularly hard hit are the populations of the wild species Alberta government policy has prohibited from rescue, rearing and release (<http://aep.alberta.ca/fishwildlife/wildlife-management/default.aspx>).

Among them are orphaned Grizzly bear cubs, an endangered species, and until April 18, 2018, orphaned Black bear cubs. Both species if reported to Alberta Environment & Parks department were, following this policy, killed by Conservation Officers of the Fish & Wildlife Enforcement Branch. Eight years of public pressure on Alberta Environment & Parks resulted in success in April, 2018, as orphaned Black bear cubs were, once again permitted to be rescued, reared and released. But endangered Grizzly cubs are, following government Policy, still killed.

The rationale for government authorized euthanasia of orphaned Grizzly bear cubs is that (1) Alberta has no facility capable of accepting, rearing and returning grizzly bear cubs to the wild, (2) no research in Alberta has demonstrated if or if not re-wilding Grizzly bear cubs is a valid conservation action, and (3) the strong belief that widespread anxiety exists amongst various Albertan stakeholders about the concept of re-wilding through returning orphaned indigenous wildlife, keystone species (bear) and other apex predators to their native habitat.

Addressing this rationale requires a threefold effort to achieve the GOAL of this project, which is the rescue, rearing and re-wilding of Grizzly bear cubs orphaned as result of human interaction:

Aspect (1) to build a enclosure specifically designed for rearing orphaned grizzly bear cubs with the intention of successfully returning them to the wild, success demonstrating that rescued bear cubs, if properly released, pose no threat to the public. Such an enclosure designed to international standards and built for rearing orphaned Grizzly bear cubs with the life skills for successful survival post release, will present the Alberta government with an ethical choice, either to kill orphaned cubs of an endangered species or permit them to have a 2nd chance at life. This is a choice that, due to current policy decisions, the government does not have at present. For success, this GOAL also requires

Aspect (2) undertaking a Pilot Project on the post-release, long-term monitoring of Black bear cubs, developing and proving release methodologies and non-intrusive monitoring equipment and

Aspect (3) Using biosocial conservationism working with First Nations, industry, tourism, and locals to develop an inclusive strategy, which if applied will benefit all.

ASPECT 1: ORPHANED GRIZZLY BEAR CUB ENCLOSURE;

The grizzly enclosure will be built on the 140 acres of natural Montane habitat at Cochrane Ecological Institute, CEI. Grizzly enclosure construction OUTLINE (attached). The enclosure will occupy 5 to 7 acres of natural habitat consisting of spruce groves and open country, plus pond, the whole encircled by an 8ft. high “game’ fence with 18 in. overhang and, sunk 4 ft into the ground, chainlink fencing, both having electric fencing on the inside. Double entry gates to an insulated building for housing neonate cubs and double entry doors/gate providing access to larger enclosure.

Consultations on the captive management of orphaned grizzly bears intended for release have been ongoing since 2010 (when the Alberta government prohibited the rescue of bear cubs of both species). As there are few people with personal experience of rearing orphaned Grizzly cubs for release we have had greater input from facilities containing groups of rescued adult Grizzly (European Brown) bears maintained in “sanctuary” non-exhibit and exhibit conditions and from organizations rearing orphaned Black bear cubs for release back into the wild. Partial list of contacts attached.

ASPECT 2: PILOT PROJECT USING BLACK BEAR CUBS IN LIEU OF GRIZZLY CUBS.

As grizzly bear cubs are prohibited from rescue, rearing and release it is not possible, at present to monitor their post release survival, re-absorption into the wild population and reproductive success. Therefore, using Black bear cubs in lieu of grizzly cubs, the aim of this study is to examine various hypotheses evaluate if and how different release methods impact not only the proportion of problem bears but also survival and recruitment of these mostly young animals into the local population to determine if rehabilitating bears is a possibility to improve resilience of wild populations. This project complies with the requirements of the April 2018 Alberta Orphaned black bear cub protocol, focuses on safety (minimizing danger of nuisance bears) and on survival and recruitment success of the animals. Due to the sample size being dependent upon the number of bear cubs orphaned each year and the amount of unavoidable variables (age when orphaned, quality of release site habitat, numbers and sex of cubs received/released, time frames of hunting seasons) we propose that this will be a long-term study spanning at least 5-10 years to get a good sample size, both helping to improve management methods and in addition train Blackfoot beneficiaries in post release monitoring methods. References are available on request. . Our partner and lead collaborative researcher on Aspect (2) is Dr. Peter Neuhaus Adjunct Professor Department of Biological Sciences, University of Calgary, Ab. Canada

ASPECT 3. Human Dimensions OUTLINE: In addressing the question of wildlife rescued, reared and returned to the wild -re-wilding- by approved wildlife rehabilitation facilities operating under government issued Wildlife Rehabilitation Permits, Alberta Environment and Parks Department has repeatedly expressed its strong belief that

widespread anxiety exists amongst various Albertan stakeholders about the concept of re-wilding through returning orphaned indigenous wildlife, keystone species (bear) and other apex predators to their native habitat in the eastern foothills and mountains of Alberta. A way to avoid generalizing society's positions towards indigenous species conservation can be achieved by accessing biosocial conservationism (Human Dimension) methods used by social scientists. As yet, no study has been undertaken to verify if, or if not, the concerns of AEP are valid ones. Nor has AEP as yet developed any strategy relating to and including people who may be directly and/or indirectly affected by a return to their indigenous habitat of indigenous wildlife, keystone species and apex predators to their native habitat. This aspect of the project, in its first year, intends to lay the groundwork for a Human Dimensions programme by identifying stakeholders, stakeholder organizations and introducing them to the collaborative and cooperative concept of working with them to achieve re-wilding goals. Our partner and lead collaborative researcher on Aspect (3) would be Dr. Sian S. Waters Honorary Research Fellow, Department of Anthropology, Durham University, UK, and among her other responsibilities, Sian is a core member of the IUCN Conservation Translocation Specialist Group's section on Human-Wildlife Interactions Website: <http://sianwaters-consulting.com>

Consultation

Kainai (Blood) support. Francis First Charger, Elder of the Kainai (Blood Tribe) has written to the previous (NDP) Minister of the Environment in support of the rescue of orphaned bear cubs and their return to the wild on Kainai Tribal Lands.

The Grizzly: A Treaty of Cooperation, Cultural Revitalization and Restoration initiated by the Piikani nation is the most signed Treaty in history with over 170 signatories (<https://www.piikaninationtreaty.com>) integral to that treaty is the request that grizzly bears be reintroduced to the Tribal Homelands, thus re-wilding this species. This International Treaty confirms that the First Nations of Alberta are not afraid of and do not disapprove of the 21st century conservation action of re-wilding.



Cochrane Ecological Institute