

Stop wasting Ontario's bears



STOP WASTING ONTARIO'S BEARS! In the weeks leading up to the provincial election, that was the message the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters delivered in an open letter to Dalton McGuinty, John Tory and Howard Hampton, as well as dozens of major media networks and local newspapers that turned to your Federation for comment about the discovery of a government bear body dump.

This summer, O.F.A.H. member Bill Barker owner of Fork Lake Resort, in Larder Lake, made the shocking discovery of at least ten dead bears, including cubs, that were left to rot on Crown land by the Ministry of Natural Resources.

"I just about got sick seeing that little bear cub on top of the heap of bears killed by the MNR. As a hunter, it is just devastating to see these animals being treated like garbage," said Barker. "Where are the animals rights groups now?"

Eight years after an unprecedented departure from scientific bear management, the O.F.A.H. continues to make the political leaders, the media and the public aware of everything we ever predicted, namely this:

- there are more bears being orphaned than were ever threatened by the spring hunt;
- nuisance bear complaints have skyrocketed across the province;
- bear damage to crops and livestock has increased;
- millions have been spent on the 'Bear Wise' program which manages people's interaction with bears and not the animals themselves;
- bear sightings are occurring in areas normally not known for bear populations;
- and an independent review questions the province's data by suggesting that the number of bears in the province may be twice what it was 12 years ago.

"It's time for all three political parties to acknowledge that political expediency was the sole reason for the cancellation of the spring bear hunt, and that neither bears nor the residents of Ontario are better off," said O.F.A.H. wildlife biologist, Ed Reid.

"The cancellation of the spring hunt was never about protecting cubs, it was about a well-funded animal rights groups seeking publicity at the expense of those with a vested interest in bear conservation, scientific population management and sustainable harvest," said Reid.

The science never supported the cancellation of the spring bear hunt. In fact, in a recently published paper, two eminent bear biologists, one from the Manitoba Department of Conservation, the other from the US Fish & Wildlife Service, concluded that based upon clear population goals, more hunting of bears, not less, is needed to avoid costly and dangerous bear encounters. In Ontario, that means adding a spring hunt in many areas.

The appalling reality is that in recent years, thousands of black bears have been shot and wasted by government officers, police and landowners in defense of private property, or in the interests of public safety.

"It's anyone's guess as to how many bear cubs have been orphaned, or as in the case of the Timmins example, also shot, because their mothers were labeled as 'nuisance' animals. The number is certainly far in excess of any possible threat to cubs that existed when the spring hunt was still in effect."

PHOTO BY RICK OWEN, NORTHERN DAILY NEWS