

PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT

Spring Bear Hunt

October 3, 2018

Opportunity

Recognize the importance of spring bear hunting by restoring the hunt permanently across the province.

Responsible Ministry: Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry

Achievability

This is a straight-forward regulatory change but could generate significant public interest. Expect significant support from the hunting community, tourist outfitters, municipalities, and rural/northern communities. Opposition and misinformation campaigns from anti-hunting groups can be also expected. These changes are in-line with the PC party's commitment to craft hunting regulations based on appropriate wildlife management practices rather than emotion.

Priority Level - High

Background

- Spring bear hunting is a huge economic driver, especially in northern and rural Ontario (e.g. \$40M economic contribution in 1996 alone).
- Spring bear hunting contributes to population management and helps us achieve bear population objectives. More importantly, it elevates the status of black bears to valuable game animals rather than vermin - a perception resulting from human-bear conflict.
- There are significant opportunities to attract small businesses and non-resident hunter participation through the outfitting industry. Spring bear hunting helps promote Ontario as a premiere hunting destination.
- Municipalities already have a mechanism to prescribe areas where discharge of firearms is prohibited, meaning they can effectively eliminate bear hunting in areas if they so choose without the province giving them the power to decide on the hunt itself. Municipalities are not equipped to make wildlife management decisions.
- When the 5-year pilot was implemented, the government also imposed new restrictions on the use of bait for bear hunting in an effort to reduce conflicts between outdoor recreationists. These restrictions have created unnecessary burdens on hunters and tourist outfitters.
- Many tourist outfitters are hesitant to invest in and promote spring bear hunting due to the temporary nature of the pilot.
- The current pilot spring bear hunt is in place until June 16, 2020, at which time the enabling regulation will sunset.
- The MNRF plans to review the impact of the hunt in 2019, prior to the final year of the pilot – including the efficacy of newly imposed baiting restrictions.

Proposed Solutions

- Remove the pilot status of the spring bear hunt by amending Table 2 in O. Reg. 670/98 (Open Seasons Regulation) to establish it permanently.
- Re-evaluate the spatial restrictions on the use of bait for the purposes of hunting bears through public consultation. The restrictions could be eliminated/modified by striking out Section 61.1 of O. Reg. 665/98 (Hunting Regulation).

Feasibility

Policy Requirements – This is a straightforward regulatory change.

Financial Investment – No additional cost beyond previously planned consultation.

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS



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Stakeholder Support – The spring bear hunt is well supported by resident hunters and the tourist industry (e.g. Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario), especially in northern and rural Ontario. Hunters have indicated they would not support giving decision-making authority to municipalities.

Public Support – The spring bear hunt is a polarizing issue and will generate considerable media attention and opposition from some members of the public (a small percentage) and anti-hunting organizations (Earthroots, Animal Alliance, Born Free USA, Humane Society Canada, etc.). Most of these concerns involve the potential orphaning of bear cubs, despite the fact that MNRF researchers have testified in a court of law that orphaning by hunters is exceedingly rare and punishable with heavy fines. Additional enforcement and education would reduce these instances even further. Concerns about cub orphaning are masking general anti-hunting sentiment, therefore we can expect these groups to spread a significant amount of misinformation.

Low risk of litigation, as multiple court cases have reaffirmed the Minister's ability to make changes to the spring bear hunt.

Time Requirements & Timing Considerations – The pilot spring bear hunt will cease on June 16, 2020. The MNRF could review the hunt's efficacy (including baiting restrictions) in 2019 as previously planned to minimize the opportunity for opponents to claim that the decision isn't evidence based. Permanency and changes to the baiting restrictions could occur in time for the 2019 spring season. For baiting regulation changes to be included in the 2019 Hunting Regulations Summary, consultation and a decision would be required by late winter 2018.

Government Benefits

All of the required regulations are currently in place. The government would simply need to remove regulatory provisions that stipulate a sunset date for the pilot hunt.

No additional cost to government but significant benefits to Ontario's socio-economic fabric, the F&W Special Purpose Account, and our ability to manage black bear populations. It would also serve to reinforce the government support for Ontario's hunting heritage.

Other Considerations

Benefits of Spring Black Bear Hunts – Fair Chase Magazine

http://www.ofah.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/BooneCrockettFC_Summer_SpringBlackBear.pdf

Is the spring bear hunt cruel or necessary? – Toronto Star

https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2014/06/14/a_bear_hunter_defends_ontarios_spring_bear_hun.html

The return of the spring bear hunt [video] – The Agenda w/ Steve Paikin

<https://youtu.be/e4jdFUalKKU>