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Bring back spring bear hunt on trial basis: Report

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Postmedia File

Reintroducing the spring bear hunt could put millions back into the hands of Northern Ontario communities, a new report released Friday by a Northern think tank says.

As a result, the Northern Policy Institute is recommending the provincial government reintroduce the spring bear hunt with a non-resident component on a trial basis.

“History has demonstrated that non-resident bear hunting, primarily individuals from the United States, has been big business for outfitters and guides in Northern Ontario, particularly during the spring season (1937-1998),” Mike Commito, a policy analyst with Northern Policy Institute, wrote in his report, *Does the Spring Bear Hunt Make ‘Cents?’*

“In the wake of the moratorium in 1999, resident and non-resident hunters have participated in extended fall seasons. The most recent data from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has placed the number of resident and non-resident hunters in 2012 at 16,378 and 4,843 respectively. Based on the cost of licenses for the 2012 season, this amounts to an estimated \$1,825,693 in license sales alone.”

The report recommends reintroducing the spring bear hunt because it will be a boon to many Northern Ontario communities with strong outfitting industries, the current black bear population can sustain additional harvesting, and other provinces such as British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador, all offer spring bear hunting opportunities.

The former Conservative government of Mike Harris cancelled the spring bear in 1999, despite opposition from many in Northern Ontario. There have been calls for its reinstatement ever since.

Many in the North, including people in Sudbury, argue the spring bear hunt would control the number of bears in the region and reduce nuisance bear calls. Many independent biologists, however, reject this argument, saying bears are wandering into urban areas because they are hungry and too many people leave food sources out that attract them.

Two years ago, the provincial government reintroduced a limited spring hunt to some parts of Northern Ontario. Only Ontario residents are allowed to hunt.

According to Commito, reintroducing a full spring bear hunt could generate millions of dollars annually for the province. In 1997, a provincial mail survey found that non-resident hunters spent \$25.2-million on spring and fall black bear hunting.

Commito said the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry estimated the current black bear population in Ontario to be 85,000 to 105,000 animals. That number can sustain additional hunting in the spring. The ministry said the current black bear population can withstand a 10 per cent harvest threshold.

“While the 10 per cent harvest rate is generally applicable across the province, it could be too high in certain parts of Ontario’s Boreal Forest region, so it is important to keep stock of these local variances in terms of acceptable harvest rates,” Commito writes. “. . . Going back through the last (14) seasons from 1999 to 2012, the estimated combined legal harvest for trappers and hunters is 75,754 black bears. This gives an expected annual average of 5,411 and therefore places Ontario in an acceptable harvest range of 5-6 percent of the total population.”

Does the Spring Bear Hunt Make ‘Cents?’ can be found at www.northernpolicy.ca.

The Northern Policy Institute, set up the provincial government, calls itself Northern Ontario’s independent think tank. It develops and promotes research, evidence and policy opportunities to support the growth of sustainable Northern Ontario communities.

Poll

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Friday, August 21, 2015

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