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Article (group)



After a summer with more than 2,000 bear sightings around Sudbury alone,

<http://www.thewaternetwork.com/news/articles/more-than-2000-bear-sightings-reported-in-sudbury-area>

A (<http://www.tvo.org/news/gta/2015/07/spring-bear-hunt-to-be-reinstated-in-ontario.html>) following a 16-year hiatus.

But how effective is the hunt in keeping people safe from errant bears? Are there other ways to curb bear wanderings without resorting to force?

Hunters will now be able to shoot male black bears between May 1 and June 15 for at least the next five years in 88 hunting regions across the province. A hunt this size will be the first since 1999, when Mike Harris' government banned the spring hunt in response to pressure from environmentalists and animal rights advocates who argued that the hunt was unnecessary and inhumane. <http://www.tvo.org/news/gta/2015/07/spring-bear-hunt-to-be-reinstated-in-ontario.html>

Police safety is a key reason the government is giving for the return of the bear hunt. Minister of Natural Resources and Energy Bill Blair (<http://www.tvo.org/news/gta/2015/07/spring-bear-hunt-to-be-reinstated-in-ontario.html>) claims that the "reintroduction of the hunt will address concerns voiced by northern communities about bears/bear conflicts" and serve as a boon to tourism and economic growth in the region.

Mark Ryckman, senior wildlife biologist with the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH), applauds the return of the hunt, for which he has advanced since its abolition, but says any profits should be targeted to conservation.

"If we were to list in order of importance all the benefits of a spring bear hunt, their public safety would be down near the bottom." The environmental benefits, however, are clear. "We're talking about tens of millions of dollars annually spent in areas that really only on those satellite towns dole out to sustain their businesses."

"If we were to completely ignore the public safety benefits, we believe that the spring bear hunt has the merits to stand on its own."

An August 2013 report by the Northern Policy Institute (<http://www.northernpolicy.ca/reports/2013/08/2013-08-13-report-on-the-spring-bear-hunt>) found that the hunt is a "vital tool" to protect people from potential bear attacks.

"Black bears are smart, unpredictable animals that are capable of being dangerous, but hunting the spring bear hunt with public safety promotes a misunderstanding of the animal that has ramifications beyond the hunting season," the report states.

The report supports the reintroduction of the hunt, but not for public safety purposes. Its authors want to use the hunt to provide a boost to northern Ontario tourism by opening it up to non-residents.

So what explains the government's emphasis on the public safety angle?

Dylan Gordon, a University of Toronto PhD candidate in anthropology who researches the Canadian trade of wild food products, says the government's focus on reducing bears/bear conflict is a product of Ontario's rural-urban divide.

Ontario's southern, city-dwelling residents are less likely to see bears as a way of life and may not be as supportive of a bear hunt seen as a cash grab. They're more likely to support it if it focuses on protecting them, says, he says.

"A lot of people who are pro-animal rights would still agree that a human's life is more valuable than a bear's," says Gordon.

Mike McIntosh, founder of Bear with Us, a sanctuary and rehabilitation centre, calls both the government's justification for resurrecting the hunt "a bunch of malarkey."

He blames hunting lobby groups like OFAH for pressuring the government into supporting a policy that ignores the issue at hand – hunting. It's not that there are too many bears wandering northern Ontario, McIntosh says, but that they're being driven into cities by hunters.

"If there were more regulations referring to hunting, it would make it a much more legitimate, honest and ethical hunt," he says.

"The bears are here," says McIntosh. "The hunters are."

Ryckman argues for the return of the hunt to end unnecessary deaths. He says it has no impact on bears' use of natural food, and that they will go to come into residential backyards for fruit or vegetables. "The fact that there is a black bear shortage because bears have been shot to death regardless of where hunters lay their trap."

Instead of putting the focus on hunting, Ryckman suggests a few supplementary measures to keep northern citizens safe from bears: strengthening garbage bins, reinforcing credit cards with bars and better monitoring the public road safety.

"Proper bear management requires the use of all available tools," he says, "including regulated hunting."

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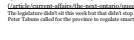
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