

# CANADIAN POLITICS

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## 'Political killing' or 'economic opportunity'? Ontario spring black bear hunt extended amid cheers and jeers



ASHLEY CSANADY | November 3, 2015 | Last Updated: Nov 4 5:02 PM ET  
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Black bear hunting has been government-sanctioned in Ontario since 1937.

Cheryl Senter/ Associated Press

Is it a "political killing" or an "economic opportunity?" Based on "bad science" or a reversal of bad public policy?

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A man loads a hunted black bear into a truck in this file photo. Should Ontario renew its spring bear hunt to bolster the northern economy? Mel Evans/ Associated Press

"I think it's just straight politics," that prompted the hunt's return, said Liz White with Animal Alliance of Canada, an animal protection organization opposed to the hunt. She called it a "political killing" and said the ministry has ignored its own science that there's little impact on nuisance bears from a spring hunt.

The new rules include a ban on hunting mother bears with cubs, but White said that doesn't account for the fact they often leave the youngest cubs up in trees while they feed. She also said the practice of "baiting" bears by leaving out food to attract them can exacerbate this problem.

For hunters, the spring offers a "substantial economic opportunity for Ontario," according to senior wildlife biologist Mark Ryckman at the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters.

It's also a unique way for to hunters as "shake off the winter blues" with one of the first hunts of the year — all while enjoying a delicacy, Ryckman added.

He said most people actually hunt bears for their meat, and believe it or not, it's tastier in the spring. That's because bears are leaner in the spring, and unlike other meats, it tastes better without all the fat accrued over the summer.



A black bear sow with two cub walks in a parking lot.

AP Photo/Alaska Public Media, Pat Yack

Ryckman said the "baiting" that so many opposed to the hunt decry actually gives hunters a chance to better observe the bear before shooting. That helps reduce the number of female or nursing bears killed by accident. Ryckman said hunters who bag a bear in the spring are unlikely to go again in the fall (the standard license only allots one bear though you can apply for an extra tag) so it shouldn't increase the annual cull.

Each year, about 5,000 bears are killed of about 20,000 licenses sold: In 2014, the province sold 17,509 licences to provincial residents and another 4,708 to non-residents, who must be accompanied by a licensed guide on their hunts. So far this year, they've sold 20,575 licences to residents, and 4,842 to non-residents.

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Mike Commito, a researcher with the Northern Policy Institute, has studied the spring black bear hunt and found it both holds economic potential and environmental risk for the black bear population. He found the ministry pulls in \$1.8 million just selling licenses and in 2002, the last year for which he could find hard data, it added \$27 million to the provincial economy, when there was no spring hunt and without adjusting for inflation.

There are about 100,000 black bears in Ontario and the population could withstand a 10 per cent hit every year, Commito said. The best way to ensure that is to offset the spring hunt by reining in the fall hunt, otherwise it will be open season on bears from May 1 to

June 15 and then from August to Halloween. He said ensuring the ministry collects good data is crucial.

"We haven't had this (hunt) for 16 years, so it's really important they have this in place so they can step back," he said.



A York Regional Police officer takes aim at a black bear in a Newmarket, Ont., backyard in June. GlobalNews via the Canadian Press

After two debatably successful years, the pilot is set to continue through 2020. Minister of Natural Resources Bill Mauro said the hope is the spring hunt will both be sustainable and help reduce the number of nuisance bear calls and the data collected will determine whether the hunt will return for food.

"We think through that mechanism we'll better be to determine over the next two, three, four, five years, any impact that this pilot will have," he said.

Yet, the province's acting Environmental Commissioner Ellen Schwartzel warned in her first annual report since taking the spring hunt did little to reduce human-bear clashes.

"Perhaps hunting does not reduce human-bear conflicts because it targets non-nuisance bears in the interior of bear habitat rather than nuisance bears at its periphery, closer to people," she writes.

The proposed regulation includes increased tracking of the hunt and Mauro hopes it will provide some hard data. But Saxe cautioned in her report that the now complete original pilot yielded too little data and only 45 per cent of hunters who purchased a license in 2014 complied (41 per cent so far this year). That collection includes a tooth of each bear killed to track its age, size and sex.

*Editor's note: This post has been updated to reflect the fact incoming Environmental Commission Dianne Saxe has yet to formally assume the office*

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**Brad Spence** · Works at Self Employed and Loving It!

Well, with less bear calls the Ministry would have more time to conduct raids on Michael Schmidt, that nasty farmer that milks cows and lets people drink it raw. That is a very pressing concern for Ontarians.

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**Terry Baran**

Definitely. Why would the government bother enforcing laws reducing the diseases spread by drinking unpasteurized milk? Better to allow Darwinism to take its course.

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Terry Baran

100's of thousands of people in Canada drink raw milk each and every day in Canada alone.

Not to mention the millions in the US and other countries were its sold in stores.

I haven't heard of any diseases that are spread by drinking it.

On average 238 people die in Canada per year of food borne illness. None from milk though.

But yes, better the Ministry direct its resources towards restricting milk than concentrating on nuisance bears.

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**Ivan Belosevic**

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**Henry Salt**

If the provincial government doesn't want people feeding bears, in fact it is illegal, why is it ok to bait bears all year long, right up until hunting season? And how is baiting a bear and sitting in a tree blind and picking it off with a rifle considered a "sport" ?

Like · Reply · 1 · Nov 4, 2015 5:29am · Edited

**Chris Ford** · Ottawa, Ontario

It's not a "sport" like baseball etc. "Sport hunting" is a term coined for modern day hunting as it is not mandatory for people to get their food. (They can go get a nicely packaged steak at the grocery store) Hunting bears (and various other game) over bait piles is one manner of hunting. It also gives a hunter more time, and more careful selection of animals/gender etc. Taking an animal via rifle or bow from a treestand generally guarantees a very clean, close and deadly shot, hence drastically reducing the chance of an ill placed bullet/arrow and animal suffering. Hope that helps.

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**Henry Salt**

Chris Ford Thanks, but that still doesn't answer the question; if feeding wildlife is illegal in Ontario, why is it ok for hunters to maintain bait stations for deer and bear?

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**Chris Ford** · Ottawa, Ontario

Henry Salt We're not feeding them. We're "baiting" them.

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**Peter Carey**

It's about time they base their decision on science. It was removed for political purposes based on misinformation in the first place...

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**Philphoy6**

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