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Spring bear hunt to be reinstated in Ontario

Black bears are back on the menu in the GTA, thanks to a provincial move to reopen the spring bear hunt province-wide for the first time in 16 years.

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The average size of a black bear is a length somewhere between 50 to 80 inches from nose to tail. A male's weight can range from 125 to 500 pounds while females clock in slightly lighter. Both can live up to their early 30s.

By: Michael Robinson Staff Reporter, Published on Tue Nov 03 2015

Black bears are back on the menu in the GTA, thanks to a provincial move to reopen the spring bear hunt province-wide for the first time in 16 years.

MPPs Bill Mauro and Jeff Leal made simultaneous announcements heralding the introduction of a five-year pilot proposal Friday. It's a move that would reopen the spring season on black bears in 88 of the province's 95 wildlife management units, at least until 2020.

The province's move to reinstate the hunt is currently available for public comment on Ontario's Environmental Registry.

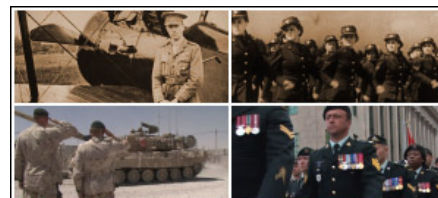
Both cabinet ministers cited concerns about human-bear conflicts and bear hunting as a tourism draw as the motivation behind the initiative. Currently, the only two provinces in Canada without a spring bear hunt are Nova Scotia and Ontario.

But at least one animal welfare organization is expressing outrage with the government's decision.

"My real gut reaction was extreme sadness for the bears," said Liz White, a director with the Animal Alliance of Canada.

"We don't hunt other big game species in the spring when they have children so why on earth are we doing it with bears?"

White believes that the announcement was a political decision, designed to maintain the



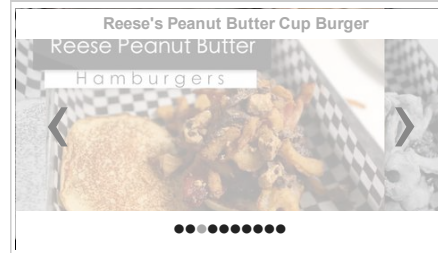
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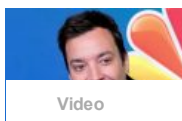
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relationship between the provincial Liberals and their northern Ontario seats.

Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters senior wildlife biologist Mark Ryckman said Friday's announcement represented a "big day" for the organization, which had been calling for the hunt's reinstatement for more than a decade-and-a-half.

According to him, both outdoorsmen and outfitters from all over Ontario, including a sizeable membership in the GTA, are celebrating the news.



SUE MANSFIELD

The spring bear hunt was indefinitely cancelled in 1999 after the issue of orphaned bear cubs became a public relations disaster for the provincial government.

Many of the newly opened wildlife management units are in accessible travelling distance for Torontonians. Areas situated along the 401 corridor and as close as North Clarington and Port Perry appear to be the closest GTA-based areas populated by black bears, eligible to be hunted. Other areas, such as the Kawarthas, Simcoe County and the Barrie-area will also be open for bear business, come spring.

After all, a spring bear tastes better than a fall bear.

"Because the bear has utilized all its fat reserves in its den during the winter, a spring bear, with little fat, is prime and delicious," he said, adding the approximate 105,000 worth of black bears living in the province are both healthy and sustainable.

The average size of a black bear is a length somewhere between 50 to 80 inches from nose to tail. A male's weight can range from 125 to 500 pounds while females clock in slightly lighter. Both can live up to their early 30s.

The spring bear hunt was indefinitely cancelled in 1999 after the issue of orphaned bear cubs became a public relations disaster for the provincial government.

Outspoken critics rallied against the hunt by citing the possibility of hunters inadvertently killing a lactating sow which could further result in the death of her cubs.

Since then, the province's 2014 two-year pilot spring bear hunt wrapped up this past June.

Other than the new locations to hunt, the five-year pilot will continue to protect bear cubs and females with cubs. If killed, the offence carries a hefty fine of up to \$25,000 and up to one year in jail. In most cases, a licensed hunter would only be allowed to hunt one bear in each calendar year. One of the most significant differences is the opening up of the hunt to non-resident hunters who travel to Ontario as well.

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A black bear climbs a tree alongside a path in Peterborough, Ont. in this July 7, 2007 file photo. An increase in the number of black bear encounters and a possible financial boom in northern Ontario are reasons enough to bring back the spring bear hunt, hunting and tourism groups argue.

Because non-residents will be required to utilize the services of an outfitter, the move means big dollars are heading towards the province’s tourist and guiding industry. Thanks to a culture for bear meat and trophy hides in the U.S., hunters from south of the border are an extremely valuable clientele.

“As far as bear hunting goes, Americans are going to be all over the province,” said Brenda Baughman, president of NOTO, an advocacy organization for tourism outfitters in Ontario. She suspects the market is ripe for their taking.

“When the spring bear hunt was cancelled, whoever wanted to pursue bear hunting didn’t stop, they just went to other jurisdictions like Quebec and Manitoba,” she said. “As a result, those hunts since 1999 have increased substantially... there is certainly a desire for people out there to hunt bear.”

The revised scope of the spring hunt holds promise for several economic and ecological impacts according to Northern Policy Institute analyst Mike Commito who released a report on the issue this past August.

“There is no guarantee we’ll recapture that lost market but based on historical data, black bear hunting has certainly been a big business here in Ontario,” he said. To reduce the likelihood of hunters killing a female, Commito recommended the province require sportsmen to complete a course that would teach them how to properly identify the sex of the bear.

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