

Inuit up in arms over proposed seismic testing

INUIT CONTINUED FROM P1

The move, says Egeesiak, is at odds with the proposal to explore for oil and gas in the ecologically sensitive area.

"They are two different focus areas and it's a major concern for us that the government is trying to do both."

POWERFUL SOUND WAVES

Surrounded by 400-metre cliffs and spectacular fjords, Lancaster Sound is one of the richest marine mammal areas in the world. During the summer months it is home to most of the world's narwhal and a third of North America's belugas. The sound is also frequented by bowhead whales, an endangered species, as well as ringed seals, harp seals, and walrus.

The testing would include 600 hours of underwater air gun blasts fired at one-minute intervals. Christopher Debicki, the Nunavut Projects Director of the Pew Environment Group's Oceans North Canada program, says this could have a devastating effect on whales' sensitive hearing and sonar navigation.

"Seismic blasts carry through the water for hundreds of kilometres and have been known to cause permanent hearing loss and disrupt feeding, migration, social bonding, reproductive success, and predator avoidance, and have been associated with whale strandings," he told the NIRB during the public comments period in April.

The testing could cause marine mammal populations to divert their course, interfering with their all-important migratory patterns, Debicki told The Epoch Times. With Lancaster Sound being the only eastern entrance to the Arctic Archipelago, this could cause problems for the mammals.

"The timing for whales as they're exiting those waters is fairly important because by late September or October the waters in that region are beginning to freeze again and some of these populations don't do well if they get frozen in, obviously."

Hunters and trappers organizations in the region are worried the tests will scare off the wildlife they depend on for a living.

In its decision, the NIRB said "it appears that there has been a lack of coordination between Geological Survey of Canada and other federal government departments when designing and communicating this project proposal."

Debicki says the government is "sending a very mixed message" with its plans to both create a conservation area in the sound and explore for oil and gas.

"We are calling for a clear statement

from the federal government that there is no intention to open up Lancaster Sound or the Lancaster Sound region to any drilling activities," he says.

Oil and gas drilling and energy exploration would be banned in the sound if it is designated as a conservation area.

FORMAL REVIEW REQUESTED

Environment Minister Jim Prentice, also the minister responsible for Parks Canada, has said that the proposed testing is just a step on the way to making Lancaster Sound a protected area.

"Lancaster Sound is an incredibly rich, ecologically-sensitive area. Part of the process that we follow any time we set aside land in Canada as a national park or a national marine conservation area is to survey all of the resources that we have," he told reporters.

"We followed the same process in the Nahanni and everywhere else. We simply need to know what we're dealing with before we designate lands as national parks."

Prentice said the seismic testing won't impede progress toward making Lancaster Sound a marine park. He also said there's "no indication" it would be detrimental to wildlife.

In its review, the NIRB recommended that all air gun start-up procedures include a "soft start/ramping up" period and that "air guns must be shut down if any marine mammal enters or is anticipated to enter the 1,000-metre safety zone."

The project is part of the \$100 million federal "Geo-mapping for Energy and Minerals" program designed to promote the discovery and exploitation of Arctic mineral and energy resources.

Debicki questions the need for the tests, saying extensive seismic surveying of Lancaster Sound was carried out in the 1970s and '80s.

"We haven't seen anything to suggest to us that there isn't already sufficient seismic data out there to provide and offer an assessment in the context of creating a marine conservation area," he says.

Egeesiak notes that Natural Resources Canada has planned a community consultation tour only after the NIRB issued its approval of the testing. She hopes Shewchuk will seek a detailed review and allow the submission of further public comments at the end of the tour.

"We wrote to the minister last week urging him to request a formal review before it's approved, so it's in the Government of Nunavut's hands right now."



Too many roads, especially those constructed for resource extraction purposes, are taking a toll on grizzly bear habitat, says a new report. PHOTOS.COM

Alberta not doing enough to protect grizzlies: Report

Network of wilderness roads and all-terrain trails hurting the bears' habitat

By **OMID GHOREISHI**
Epoch Times Staff

EDMONTON—The primary way to recover Alberta's declining grizzly bear populations is to minimize contact between people and bears by limiting the number of roads in grizzly-bear habitat, says a new report.

Released last Friday by a coalition of conservation groups, the report said the outlook for Alberta's grizzlies "under current conditions is a 98.6 per cent risk of population decline by 30 per cent or more over the next 36 years."

Titled "A Grizzly Challenge," the report was released the same week a grizzly sow was killed after being hit by a train in Banff National Park and another sow was illegally shot and later put down near Cardston.

Sarah Elmeligi, senior conservation planner with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, one of the sponsors of the report, says the report showcases where the government has fallen short on grizzly bear recovery.

"The ultimate goal of a report like this is to motivate the government to fully implement the Grizzly Bear Recovery Action [Plan] in the province," says Elmeligi, noting that the plan itself falls short of recovering grizzly populations to their fullest potential.

Recommendations of the Alberta Grizzly Bear Recovery Action Plan, which was adopted by the province in 2008, include suspending the grizzly bear

hunt, gathering and conducting scientific data, and educating the public.

The report also recommends implementing strong government legislation, citing evidence that this approach has worked south of the border.

"We'd like to see improvements in legislation associated with roads in particular," says Elmeligi. "Roads are being constructed for resource extraction purposes in grizzly bear habitat, so we'd like to see legislation associated with roads being removed or reclaimed once the resource extraction purpose is completed."

A 2010 report published by the province puts the current grizzly count in both provincial and federal lands at 760. The province's Endangered Species Conservation Committee has recommended that grizzlies be listed as a threatened species. So far, this has not been approved by Alberta's Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, Mel Knight.

Dave Ealy, a spokesperson for Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, says Knight is consulting with colleagues on the issue.

He says that since a major aspect of wildlife management is about managing people and the government is trying to understand all the concerns Albertans may have before a decision is made.

For example, he says some Albertans have talked to the ministry about whether they'd be safe in the back country if grizzly bears are listed as a threatened species, or what the implications would be in certain areas with industry operations.

Even if grizzlies are designated as a threatened species, Ealy says he doesn't anticipate there would

be much change from what the government is currently doing as it is already following the recovery plan.

"The Recovery Plan is pretty comprehensive, and it addresses virtually all of the objectives of a good recovery plan; it took a long time to build," he says.

SMALL POPULATIONS MORE VULNERABLE

Dr. Scott Nielsen, an assistant professor of conservation biology at the University of Alberta, says one reason the government is hesitant to list grizzlies as threatened could be that it would place additional pressure on access management. This would limit road development and hence reduce access for oil and timber extraction, and further result in the full suspension of hunting until populations are considered recovered.

"Although everyone is looking to science for a solution, science can only provide guidance and information for decision-making. When this information aligns with public and political sentiment, all is well. When it suggests otherwise, you have the situation we are currently in," Nielsen says.

However, he agrees that the recovery plan can be implemented without a change in status for the bears.

"In fact, in an ideal world, it would be best to implement recovery plans for species before they are listed as threatened or endangered to avoid the problems associated with trying to rescue a species right before its funeral."

Nielson explains that Alberta has low habitat productivity due to its cool, continental climates with short growing season, no

access to salmon, and a relatively poor production of fruit compared to British Columbia and Montana, all of which limit the size of grizzly bear populations. This is particularly problematic as small populations are more vulnerable to population decline, so recovery will be slow.

"The species is especially sensitive to human-caused mortalities that result from increased access of habitats that were previously inaccessible," he says.

The "pioneering phase of resource management" in Alberta, combined with the negative attitudes of a small percentage of Albertans toward grizzly bears, presents a serious management challenge for the bears.

"In the long-term, it will take education and a new generation of folks focused on stewardship... to make roads a non-issue," Nielsen says.

He notes that Scandinavia went through the same cycle. A century ago, their brown (grizzly) bear population dropped to 500. Today it exceeds 3,000, with no reduction in the number of roads.

"The difference is that they are no longer using the same pioneering attitudes that they once had and that we still favour here."

Nielson agrees with the report's conclusion that the government needs to do more to recover the grizzly population. A good place to start, he says, is by "implementing the recovery team recommendations and the Endangered Species Conservation Committee recommendations that the species be listed as threatened."

Ealy says the department of Sustainable Resource Development is currently reviewing the report.



A seismic ship capable of performing as an icebreaker in the Arctic. Proposed seismic testing in Lancaster Sound would include 600 hours of underwater blasts from air guns towed by a German research ship. ISTOCK PHOTO

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Fake pot making inroads into Canada

MARIJUANA CONTINUED FROM P1

The imitation pot is reportedly not as widely used in Canada, largely because the real thing is more readily available here and K2 is also classed as a controlled substance. However, the product is still entering the country.

Health Canada is working on providing information to border officials and law enforcement agencies to help them identify products containing the substance, according to Canwest News.

A Health Canada spokesperson told Canwest that the agency took action after enquiries from police departments about whether such products were legal to buy or sell

The product, which sells for between \$30 and \$70, is a blend of herbs is sprayed with a marijuana-like drug

in Canada.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, which has dubbed K2 "stealth marijuana," lists a variety of other names for the leafy product including Spice

Gold, Yucatan Fire, Genie, Spice Silver, and Spice Diamond.

According to a DEA report, the substance can be "hundreds of times more potent" than marijuana. The agency's website says K2 is "reputedly laced with various synthetic cannabinoids or synthetic cannabinoid mimicking compounds."

In early May, Kansas became the first U.S. state to ban the synthetic marijuana. Others including Missouri—where the substance seems the most popular—Nebraska, and Georgia are also considering measures that would ban the dealing of such products.