

SPRING BEAR HUNT

Issue

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources is reviewing the results of the two-year spring bear hunt pilot program with a view to making a decision on how to proceed.

Background

In November 2013, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources proposed a spring bear hunt pilot program as a way to enhance public safety and mitigate human-bear conflicts in Northern Ontario. Running from May 1 to June 15 in 2014 and 2015, the pilot program was the first spring bear hunting to take place in the province since it was indefinitely cancelled in 1999. The two-year project focused on the eight wildlife management units (WMUs) adjacent to the North's five largest population centers: North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Timmins, and Thunder Bay.

Ontario's black bear management program needs to adhere to the guiding principles laid out in the province's 2009 proposal for enhanced management: "Black bears have an intrinsic value within natural ecosystem and positive socio-economic value when managed by sustainable use principles" (Framework, 2009). Regardless of the economic potential that they possess, black bears need to be managed in perpetuity so that they remain an integral part of Ontario's rich natural heritage.

As outlined in the Northern Policy Institute report "Does the Spring Bear Hunt Make 'Cents'?", the implementation of a spring bear hunt with a non-resident component on a trial basis would generate millions of dollars annually for the province and would be a boon to many communities in northern Ontario where there is a strong outfitting industry.

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). 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 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. From 1999 to 2012, resident hunters spent \$6.5 million and non-resident hunters spent \$16.4 million on fall bear hunting licenses. With just a cursory look at licensing sales, it is clear that non-residents are still injecting the most money into the province when it comes to bear hunting.

Recommendation

NOACC calls on the Government of Ontario to immediately implement a spring bear hunt with a non-resident component for a multi-year trial period as it represents a significant economic opportunity for communities in Northern Ontario.

Adopted by the membership: September 24, 2015