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Anecdotal evidence has role to play in determining grizzly numbers

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Re: "Anecdotes about grizzlies not on par with science, groups say; Minister Ted Morton to weigh both sides in decision on hunt," The Journal, Feb. 22.

The Alberta Fish and Game Association fully supports Sustainable Resource Development Minister Ted Morton in his decision to use scientific data along with anecdotal evidence collected by the Wilmore Wilderness Foundation in deciding the future of the moratorium on hunting grizzly bears in Alberta.

In this article, Nigel Douglas of the Alberta Wilderness Association, which is critical of Morton's approach, says the anecdotal information doesn't bear any resemblance to the data collected in a five-year study.

But just how reliable is the data supplied by the studies? Acquiring an accurate picture of the grizzly population is extremely difficult because of the bear's nature to roam over very large areas of land. Over the past several years, the number of grizzlies in Alberta has been reported at anywhere between 327 and 1,000. If this is not enough to question the scientific data, then what is?

Further, the most recent DNA sampling data does not include results for all of Alberta, including national parks. The sampling could thus be quite skewed, akin to someone taking a moose survey in the grassland region of the province and, based on the presumably low numbers, extrapolating that to mean that moose numbers are a concern.

As someone who earns a living from science, I am puzzled as to how decisions and recommendations

were made, considering that there has never been any baseline established for grizzly populations, nor a carrying capacity of these wonderful creatures in Alberta. Granted, anecdotal evidence should not be used solely to make decisions, especially far-reaching ones; however, it should not be summarily dismissed, especially when it may lead to a new and better hypothesis.

The more than 19,000 members of the Alberta Fish and Game Association look forward to an exact and truthful resolution to the grizzly bear issue based on facts, and not the emotions of a few.

Quentin Bochar, president, Alberta Fish and Game Association, Edmonton

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