**Commercial Bear Viewing Association**
of British Columbia

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Commercial Bear Viewing Association
Wildlife and Habitat Engagement Process

**Introduction**

The *Commercial Bear Viewing Association* of British Columbia (CBVA) was formed to promote sustainable bear viewing in British Columbia (BC) and aid in the protection of wild bears and their ecosystems. The CBVA is committed to continuing to evolve and develop the bear viewing industry by updating our viewing techniques and strategies as new research and our experience dictate, developing best practices and developing a guide certification program. We also help fund important, professional research on human-bear interactions.

The CBVA is looking forward to be a part of this review process and is excited to lending its wealth of knowledge of grizzly, black and Kermode bears to the conversation. Our hopes are that the government will remain focused on the issue and realize that action is required, today, for wildlife management.

The CBVA strongly believes in conservation, through science and professional research on human-bear interactions. CBVA members have established a set of Best Management Practices and Code of Conduct for the bear viewing industry, in consultation with industry, government and bear biologists and based on the best science available. They have been put in place to safeguard both guests and bears and ensure the sustainability of bear viewing in BC.

The CBVA is happy to comment on the following challenges the government is facing:

1. Advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples
2. Increasing Human Activity
3. Human-Wildlife Conflict
4. Funding

## 1. Advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples

The CBVA believes that working with Indigenous peoples on wildlife management and conservation is paramount to the future of wildlife in this province. As stewards of the land, working together to allow for government-government conversations that surround the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is the way forward in bringing the storytelling and work that indigenous peoples are doing into focus. The CBVA is actively working on a partnership with Indigenous Tourism BC on building a framework for developing business opportunities around bear viewing in indigenous communities. As the original storytellers, bringing the indigenous viewpoint forward will help with building opportunities for communities throughout the province in terms of business development,

cohesive working relationships with stakeholders, and safety regarding human-wildlife interactions within communities.

## 2. Increasing Human Activity

The CBVA strongly believe that human activity, through harvest, is not the way to manage wildlife, specifically bears. While there is science that points to the age-old conservation model of harvest, the CBVA believes through non-harvest conservation, human activity can be monitored, and wildlife can thrive throughout BC.

Increasing the public awareness, through education, is paramount. With an increasing number of people using wildlife habitat as a recreation playground, education through indigenous communities, government, and tourism industry leaders is the way forward. There is also a specific rise in visitors to BC that also require education. To be able to continue to offer a pristine wilderness experience, that BC is known for, the protection of humans should become of the focus. Humans are visitors into the wildlife habitat. Humans can no longer engage in a thoughtless process with wildlife. A thorough engagement process with individuals, industry and communities where wildlife plays a large role in the landscape should be a continuous and ongoing process to ensure the best for wildlife.

## 3. Human-Wildlife Conflict

The CBVA encourages the government to involve the CBVA and the Brown Bear Research Network (also known as *Bear ID Project*) on a government to stakeholder consultation process with regards to human-bear interaction/conflict.

Concerns over human-wildlife interactions are rising. With the closure of the grizzly hunt and the rise of bear viewing, both commercially and recreationally, the focus is needed on what the underlying cause of these interactions are. Most interactions are human-caused through neglect of understanding wildlife, their habits, and how to live cohesively with them.

What are the most effective ways to reduce wildlife-human conflicts in BC? To engage in an educational campaign, province-wide, that teaches and educates both residents of BC and visitors that wildlife is just that, wild. They require respect and boundaries and that all our actions have effects on them, whether positive or negative, we impact wildlife daily.

Bylaws and enforcement from Conservation Officers or in the form of land stewards from indigenous communities are all paramount when it comes to human-wildlife interactions. Leaving attractants available should be monitored and followed up on with enforcement.

Simply, education is key, and education only works when there is follow up procedure to ensure that those educated are living and following the laws set forth.

## 4. Funding

In terms of funding for conservation in BC, the CBVA is committed to providing funding, through commercial bear viewing activities. To date, we have adopted a conservation licencing fee to help assist in the funding of bear conservation. Previously, members of the CBVA donated to conservation through a multitude of different venues. Presently, we are working with the government to ensure that bear conservation remains focused.

Please contact the CBVA's Executive Director, Katherine MacRae, directly for further information on this topic. kathy@bearviewing.ca

**Conclusion**

The CBVA would like to thank the government for engaging both stakeholders and the public in this process. We feel the engagement process is a thorough one and are happy to be part of it.

The CBVA strongly believes that through education and a continued commitment from the government for wildlife engagement, that wildlife in BC has a chance to continue to exist in BC. There are, indeed, some changes that will have to be made, changes revolving around how humans interact with wildlife, but feel through the commitment from government, that these changes are possible. The CBVA advocates for a healthy, balanced relationship between humans and wildlife and would like to see a new approach based on neutral impact to all wildlife, enforcement of bylaws, and non-consumptive conservation as the model that BC adapts.