



Alpine Club of Canada-Whistler Section

TO RMOW MAYOR AND COUNCIL

In 2019 the Whistler section of the Alpine Club of Canada, which has over 500 members, formed an Alpine Access sub Committee. The goal was to increase hiker access to the alpine in the Whistler area. We have identified to date at least 5 ways local and tourist hikers can better access hiking above the treeline in Whistler. This may become more relevant if due to COVID 19 Vail is unable to open their lifts to transport hikers to the alpine. We have discussed access to hiking being restricted in the interests of encouraging the establishing a local grizzly bear population and the conservation of grizzly bears. We read on April 16 in the Pique that RMOW, without consulting local hikers or bikers, has endorsed a Grizzly Bear Conflict Mitigation Strategy. The result appears to be to stop planned trail construction and restrict recreating in local areas used by a grizzly bear.

To make such a decision is a display of a lack of balance between the interests of encouraging grizzly bears and the interests of hikers and bikers. What is missing is a study, or consideration, of the need to protect both the public and the bears. We are a big province with lots of grizzly bear habitat free of humans. In the lower mainland where over 3 million people who need to recreate, RMOW should not be favouring the bear over the human. This week for the first time to my knowledge, a young grizzly was seen in Whistler municipality. It was seen on Crabapple Drive and eating grass at Meadow Park. Are we to cease all use of the Valley trail if it becomes a spring eating location for the grizzly bear? If we encourage the 8 grizzly bears living in the Callaghan Valley to live without learning to coexist with hikers we will have many more bears losing their fear of us. We will have conflict in our residential areas.

All members of our Sub Committee have experience hiking in grizzly bear country. We all respect the bears and are not advocating a return the grizzly bear hunting. However, we observe most grizzly bears are shy and will avoid hikers. We should not be prevented from hiking the Skywalk and the Sproatt/ Rainbow areas. Last year we are told the RMOW trail

counter recorded 6226 hikers on the Skywalk trail, 4534 on the Rainbow trails and 7980 bikers and hikers on the Sproatt trails. Are we to stop because the area is used by grizzly bears?

We have a snow free alpine hiking season of about 4 months. In 2018 our season was cut in half because one or two grizzly bears were seen on the Skywalk trail. Did anyone think of tranquilizing the grizzly and remove them to a valley well away from here to discourage their use of this area? Do the National parks in the Rockies close a hiking trail whenever it is used by a grizzly bear? To our knowledge only if it is a problem bear and threatens the public.

A better course of action is not to favour bears living near Whistler over the inhabitants trying to go for a hike. Rather like black bears we try to co exist but if in conflict the bear is removed. Why adapt a grizzly bear agenda that does not include recreational use. We should have signage and rules when entering areas frequented by grizzly bears such as carrying bear spray and or an air horn. If a grizzly bear is in the area recommend, or mandate, at the trail head, a minimum group size and ban less than 3 entering the area. Patrol by helicopter to encourage the bear to move on from the Sproatt/ Rainbow/ Skywalk/ Garibaldi prime recreation areas.

A better policy is to continue the construction of trails designed by experts and already commenced by the RMOW. The grizzly bears being shy will likely either move on because they do not like humans or get used to us. There is more land in BC that is free of humans for the grizzly bears. Do not encourage them to live close to the world famous recreation location where we hike.

We are happy to meet with you, or your experts, to collaboratively work on a more balanced approach.

Yours truly,

Michael Blaxland
Chair
Alpine Access Sub Committee
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