

POPULATIONS BEAR (GRIZZLY)

SHIH

There is not much scientific information on bears in VGFN traditional territory. Bear populations are naturally low compared to other parts of the Yukon because of relatively poor habitat. Bear populations are higher on the North Slope (Inuvialuit Settlement Region / Ivvavik National Park) than further inland (VGFN traditional territory). Extensive traditional knowledge exists on bear behaviour. There are no concerns about the present status of grizzlies in VGFN traditional territory and the community is mainly looking for means of maintaining a healthy population. In this respect the special status of grizzlies on the Fishing Branch River has been recognized by declaring the core salmon spawning portion an Ecological Reserve through the Land Claims settlement and the surrounding watershed as a Wilderness Preserve and Habitat Protection Area through the Yukon Protected Area Strategy.

Concern

Maintaining the grizzly bear population in Ni'iinlii'njik (Fishing Branch).

The primary considerations for designing the Ni'iinlii'njik (Fishing Branch) Wilderness Preserve is the long-term sustainability of the karst-hydrologic-grizzly bear relationship. The area contains the watershed of the Fishing Branch River and is sufficiently large to accommodate multiple female grizzly bear home ranges surrounding the Ecological Reserve. The Vuntut Gwitchin recognize Ni'iinlii'njik as one of the most important areas in their traditional territory. VGFN citizens have asked that the grizzly bears at Fishing Branch be protected from hunting and have agreed not to hunt bears in the Wilderness Preserve. There is no history of hunting by licensed hunters at this remote location. The un-hunted bear population is also important for tourism, i.e. commercial guiding. (*See Non-Consumptive Use*)

Solution Recognize special status of Fishing Branch grizzly bear population.

The importance of the Fishing Branch area and its management needs formal recognition in VGFN policies and implementation. This will enhance and simplify management of the area.

Actions	
Responsible parties, Time line	
YG/NYRRC	Request voluntary no-hunting of grizzlies in Fishing Branch and monitor.*
2001/02	
2002/03	The Vuntut Gwitchin and Yukon government will pursue the protection of grizzly bears within the Fishing Branch Wilderness Preserve. This will be done by requesting hunters to voluntarily not hunt in this area. Effectiveness of the voluntary compliance will be monitored. If necessary, hunting closures will be regulated.
2003/04	
2004/05	Presently, Game Management Sub-zones in the Goal 1 area are open for grizzly hunting by Yukon residents although virtually none occurs there. New hunting synopses would highlight these areas as "voluntary" no-hunting zones for residents. Compliance would be monitored through harvest reporting which is intensively regulated for grizzlies (you must report your kill and bring in the skull and baculum). Yukon resident hunters have long argued that they should receive the opportunity to demonstrate wise management through voluntarily no-hunting restrictions. [2001-NY-AI-23]

continued...

NYRRC/YG
2001/02

Develop voluntary no-hunting options for consistency with Fishing Branch management plan.*

This is support for the previous action item to ensure that regardless of the approach, grizzlies will be protected in the Fishing Branch area. [2001-NY-AI-24]

YG/VGFN
2004/2005

Review effectiveness of voluntary no-hunting grizzlies on Fishing Branch.

This would consist of a summary from VGFN and the Yukon government of incidents of grizzly hunting in the Fishing Branch region. Such information would come from VGFN harvest monitoring, public reports recorded by the Game Guardian, Yukon government harvest information, Conservation Officer reports and any other government reports related to the area. [2001-NY-AI-25]

* Note: Coordination between the Ni'iinlii'njik (Fishing Branch) Wilderness Preserve and Habitat Protection Area Management Plan and the Integrated Fish and Wildlife Management Plan is achieved through action items appearing in the integrated plan and referenced in the Fishing Branch Management Plan. Similarly, such references will appear in other plans within VGFN traditional territory, e.g. Vuntut Park Management Plan and an eventual plan for the Old Crow Flats Special Management Area.

Concern

Are radio-collars necessary?

This concern was raised during the community consultations but could not be dealt with in the time available during the planning session. It could be revisited at the mid-term plan review, and will be dealt with on a case by case basis in the interim.