

The Toronto Star
One Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5E 1E6

December 14, 2005

Dear sir:

In your editorial of Dec. 9, you suggest that the premier should resist the pressure from MPPs in northern Ontario to reinstate a spring bear hunt. Unfortunately, every one of the arguments you give for not reinstating the hunt is based on incorrect "facts".

You suggest that a spring hunt orphans cubs. Figures from the Ministry of Natural Resources demonstrate that this is clearly not the case. Although it was illegal to shoot sows with cubs, MNR records for the five years preceding the cancellation do not show a single charge being laid, or even warning given for illegally shooting a sow with cubs. Estimates by ministry biologists suggested that orphaning of cubs due to hunting was so low as to be insignificant.

Orphaning of cubs has increased dramatically since the cancellation of the spring hunt. Some are orphaned when their mothers are killed as nuisance bears, but most orphaning probably occurs when the sow is killed defending her cubs from a cannibalistic male bear. Bears are highly territorial, so increasing population density increased this behaviour.

Your editorial also suggests that bears are hunted mainly as trophies, and that the meat is wasted. Again, this is absolutely untrue. It is illegal to waste game meat, including bear, and there is no evidence whatsoever that this meat is commonly wasted. Contrary to the popular myth, black bear meat is absolutely delicious and very easy to prepare. Why would any hunter throw it away? On the other hand, the nuisance bears being killed by local officials are being wasted. They are generally disposed of at local dumps, and provide neither food nor economic benefit to anyone.

You also suggest that the spring hunt brought very little economic benefit. Most estimates suggest that it was about a \$40 million annual activity. In communities struggling with declines in traditional industries like forestry, this is a significant figure. Furthermore, the hunt extended the tourism season by six weeks or more and provided an important infusion of income at the very start of the season. Very few tourism operators have found other activities to attract guests during this time, and therefore stay closed. The losses don't stop there. Guests who came to Ontario to hunt in the spring often returned for fishing or other vacation activities later in the season. Those people now go to Quebec or Manitoba.

.../2

A spring hunt for black bears makes sense for the same reasons that hunting other animals in the fall makes sense. Bears are different than moose or deer. They give birth at a different time of year, and their main food needs occur at a different time.

The issue of the spring hunt should not be decided because of nuisance bears. Black bears are a magnificent animal and a valuable renewable resource. The fact that the discussion has shifted to nuisance animals and dangerous encounters is sad evidence that black bears are rapidly losing their status as a highly prized big game animal and being regarded as valueless vermin.

Any black bear management strategy should be evaluated on the basis of sustainability of the resource, socio-economic benefit and humane hunting practices. A well regulated spring hunt clearly meets the test on all of these counts. The cancellation was a mistake, based on misinformation. The time has come for the premier to do the right thing and correct that mistake.

Sincerely,

Doug Reynolds
Executive Director

