



Lilwat Nation Mourns Loss of Twin Grizzly Bears

(Lilwat Nation, BC - November 6, 2024) The Lilwat Nation is mourning the loss of orphaned twin grizzly bears that were killed in response to safety concerns.

"Our community is grieving the loss of these spectacular animals," said Skalúlmecw Chief Dean Nelson. "We hope that by disclosing this additional information, we can help the community gain a better understanding of the situation and assist in the healing process following this loss."

Born in February 2023 in the Upper Lillooet River Basin, the twin grizzlies and their mother were well known to the community by September 2023. At that time, upon hearing reports that the animals had been harassed by a tour company, the Nation shut down the illegal tour operator.

The mother was no longer observed after June 2024 and the cubs were on their own from then on. When the two yearlings recently began expanding their food gathering area, the Nation notified Conservation and the Coast to Cascades-Grizzly Bear Initiative to avoid potential human-bear conflicts. Sonia Nicoll, Human Wildlife Conflict Officer, holds a permit for an Aversive Conditioning Pilot Program, which aims to teach grizzly bears to avoid human-specific areas, enhancing safety for both residents and wildlife.

We discussed various strategies, including aversive conditioning, hazing and relocation. Coast to Cascades did not recommend relocating the animals, based on a number of factors that would risk the bears safety. Relocating yearling cubs during the hyperphagias stage could pose risking them not knowing where to find enough food to sustain them for winter hibernation, relocating into another bear's territory could result in being mauled by another bear, and very often relocated bears manage to return to the original location after being relocated.

Given the urgency, Coast to Cascades proceeded with a hazing strategy. Hazing is a technique where deterrents (e.g., rubber bullets, noisemakers, beanbag rounds, etc.) are administered to a bear to immediately move the bear out of an area or discourage undesirable behaviour. Hazing actions are limited to daylight hours due to safety concerns.

Lilwat Nation's community Safety Officer, the Lands and Resources Department, Public Works Department, and Lilwat Nation Volunteer Fire Department worked directly with community member volunteers to remove bear attractants, share information and implement a safety plan for Hallowe'en. The bears continued to be noticed by community members and their whereabouts shared on social media as they moved towards the Pemberton Airport area.

On October 30, the Nation received a report that the bears had found their way into a free-range farm, where they ate chickens, ducks and guinea fowl. In addition, it was confirmed that their bears scat contained household garbage. These facts increased the likelihood that bears would not return to their original habitat.

As reports from community members continued, Lílwat Nation repeatedly contacted Conservation. On November 2, the bears returned to the community where they were ultimately shot and killed by a community member during a close encounter. The bears were repeatedly sighted on their porch, over multiple consecutive nights. Despite shouting, banging pots together, and dogs barking, the bears' behaviour remained unafraid. The community member repeatedly requested assistance with this concern, including from the Conservation Office. Lílwat Nation reached out to Conservation again requesting that they take action. (Neither the Nation nor Coast to Cascades is authorized to initiate action during these types of close encounters with bears.)

Before confirmation of the death of the two grizzlies, the Conservation Office shared in an emergency meeting, with a Lílwat Nation representative present, that they recommended the destruction of the male bear and to collar and relocate the female in hopes that her half-siblings further up in the Pemberton Meadows would allow her to stay in the area. The Nation released a statement on Facebook on November 4 letting the public know that the bears had been killed, a ceremony where a tobacco offering was made had been held, and that the animals had been buried.

“The Lílwat Nation hopes to continue to work together with Coast to Cascade,” said Skalúlmecw Chief Dean Nelson. “It’s strongly recommended that community members learn more about the programs Coast to Cascade has in place that can help remove attractants from yards and learn more about finding ways to coexist with our bear kin. We all have a responsibility to recreating a balance in our relationship to the bears of our area.”

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About Lílwat Nation

Lílwat Nation is a progressive First Nation’s community located 7 km north of Pemberton, BC. With a membership of almost 2,300 people — approximately 1,495 of whom live in the community — the Lílwat Nation is the third largest First Nation in the province. The Nation is striving towards self-determination for, and by, the citizens of Lílwat by continuing to exert control over its Territory and resources. With economic development focused on land and resource management, Lílwat Nation is building the foundation for a sustainable community by exploring opportunities in retail, forestry, construction, agriculture, energy projects and tourism.

The Lílwat Nation’s government, headed by an elected chief, a culture chief and an 11-person council, is committed to transparency and employs best practices in all aspects of governance.