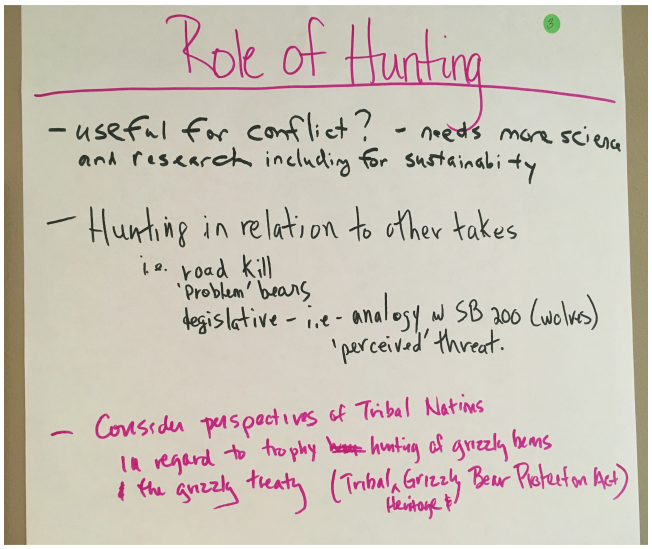
Comments on the Role of Hunting in Grizzly Bear Management
Submitted by Claudia Narcisco

I have attended most of the grizzly bear advisory council meetings as a member of the public. At the first in East Helena in October, the public participated in an exercise documenting questions on a number of topics. These included the role of hunting. As shown in the photo of the Role of Hunting flip chart questions the public wanted answered included:

- Whether hunting was useful to address conflict and the expressed need for more science and research including consideration of sustainability.
- The relationship of hunting to other 'takes' including but not limited to road kill, 'problem' bears, and aggressive legislative actions such as SB 200, which analogous to wolves allowed landowners to kill wolves at 'perceived' threat. And,
- Consideration of perspectives of Tribal Nations in regard to trophy hunting of grizzly bear and the grizzly treaty (Tribal Heritage Bear Protection Act).



Six months later and except for inconclusive discussions on whether hunting can reduce conflict, there is still no consideration of the other questions asked by the public at the onset of the advisory council specific to the role of hunting.

Regarding whether hunting can reduce conflict, the materials posted on the website offer discussion but no conclusion. The FWP briefing paper addressed whether "hunting could modify the behavior of bears so as to reduce their danger to humans." It determined, "We are not aware of definitive research that could support or refute either assumption for grizzly bears in Montana."

FWP referenced two studies on black bear in other 'jurisdictions', but these did not consider 'confounding effects of local food conditions on complaints.' Studies in Wisconsin and Ontario found no evidence that 'harvest' reduced subsequent human-bear conflict. Conflict was associated more with human population growth, annual variation in food sources, with complaints increasing with poor supply. These are the same conditions we face in Montana.

FWP references one position paper that concludes: "*Where the primary management objective is to slow population growth or limit population size or distribution, then increasing human-caused mortality is the only option. A regulated and monitored hunt can do this effectively...Conversely, if the primary management goal is to reduce human-bear conflict, the crucial and, arguably, only efficient and long-term way to do so is through education, outreach, and implementation of practices and regulatory policies that remove bear attractants...*"

So, unless the goal of the advisory council is to 'limit population size and/or distribution', HUNTING IS THE WRONG TOOL and should not be allowed to take up so much of the air in the room at this time. It certainly should not be recommended to the governor as a method to move grizzly recovery or social tolerance forward. Instead, **the council should discard the question of hunting as a means to control grizzly bear behavior and focus more on human behavior with well developed recommendations that address education, outreach, and practices and policies that remove bear attractants**.

The FWP support team pointed out that in regards to recreational hunting, the numbers would be so small that behavioral effects at the population level would be unlikely. They stated that, "although a hunt specifically targeting nuisance bears is theoretically possible, it would be logistically difficult and raise ethical issues regarding fair chase."

While the FWP team resorted to inconclusive studies of hunting on black bears in jurisdictions far from Montana, they missed the opportunity to include the works of respected regional scientists, wildlife biologists with direct experience with grizzly bear and its habitat in the Northern Rockies. For a start the council should become familiar with the document titled, "*The Status of the Grizzly Bear and Conservation of Biological Diversity in the Northern Rocky Mountains*", a short compendium of their work and research provided to each member by the Flathead Lolo Bitterroot Citizens Task Force. Several other regionally relevant presentations are also made available for the council to consider for this meeting.

At several of the governors grizzly bear advisory council meetings tribal elders, biologists, and/or members voiced their objections to hunting of grizzly bear as inconsistent with tribal culture and values. At the Polson meeting in January, I expressed my appreciation of the opening words of Tony Incashola, words that honored the grizzly bear and; that understanding of this role would override hate and fear. He said to NEVER kill a grizzly bear except in self-defense. The advisory council should be aware that a grizzly bear hunt dishonors traditions of many tribal peoples. That this is nowhere reflected in the presentations and discussion materials provided at this juncture is inexcusable.

Upon grizzly bear listing under the ESA in 1975, hunting was closed in all areas except the NCDE. The FWP paper says only that in *response to a lawsuit* a court injunction closed the fall hunting season in 1991 and that subsequently the USFWS removed the authority for Montana to establish a grizzly hunt by federal rule. More information would have been appreciated. Fortunately, the Swan View Coalition disclosed that it along with Fund for Animals filed the lawsuit to end the grizzly bear hunt in 1991, since at that time it was responsible for 48% of all known human-caused grizzly bear mortality in the NCDE. That hunting is even entertained as a hopeful means to garner social tolerance and placate a small but vocal constituency, shows that little has changed in the nearly 30 years since. If anything, pressures of a growing human population in key areas threaten recovery.

Any recommendation to promote removal of the grizzly bear from the protections of the Endangered Species Act is premature, as is return of a grizzly bear hunt in Montana, the Northern Rocky Mountains, or else in the lower-48 states where the grizzly bear is listed.