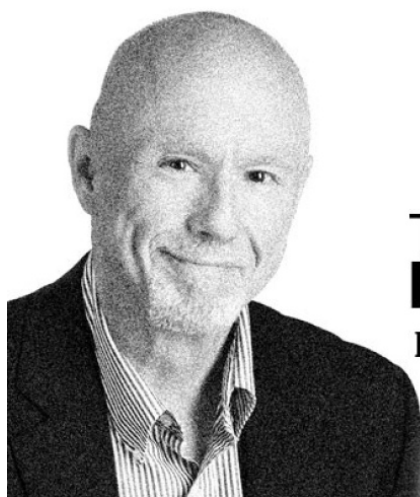


north shore news

SULLIVAN: Bears vs. humans: Can we all just get along?

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The
NORTH SIDE
Paul Sullivan

I was hoping we'd make it through the summer without a bunch of dead bears scattered across the landscape, but it was a faint hope.

The main problem (or excuse) most often given is that the bears have developed a taste for people food, and if the people get in the way, tough. Or mother bears see a threat to their cubs and attack.

The most recent victim of its own appetite, the Capilano Canyon bear, was shot on Sept. 3. It was one of more than 145 bears taken out so far this year across B.C. by conservation officers, police and private citizens.

Yes, these are big, dangerous A-list predators, but in a world where big, dangerous A-list predators are increasingly rare, there has to be another way.

Here on the North Shore we may not realize it, because we have incredible access to one of the world's last great wildernesses, but humans have pretty much wiped most of the A-list predators off the face of the planet.

Lions, for example. There are about 40,000 left in the world. That's in the world. There are plenty of domestic pussycats, about 600 million, but the king of beasts is mainly a Disney artifact. Hakuna matata.

And it doesn't stop with predators. This is an equal opportunity holocaust. A World Wildlife Fund study issued in 2014 maintained that half the world's wild animals have simply disappeared in the last 40 years.

That's half, as in 50 per cent. Of all the animals. In the world.

That's not enough for the United States Department of Agriculture Wildlife Service, which is busy reducing that number by 7,400 wild animals a day. The service, dedicated to "resolve wildlife conflicts to allow people and wildlife to coexist," terminally resolved 2.7 million wild animals by various means for various reasons in 2014.

It would be interesting to know how they define “coexist” at the USDA.

Yet, the USDA has nothing on our own conservation services. The USDA euthanized 570 black bears for the entire year across the entire U.S. Our own conservation service sent 146 black bears to the big salmon stream in the sky this year between April and June. That’s three months, just in B.C.

I’ll admit there are more black bears than lions, about 120,000-150,000 in B.C. alone. So many that people get to kill 4,000 a year just for fun. So what if half the animals in the world are gone?

But if you’re a fan of the wild, and I am, it’s galling to watch these magnificent beings sacrificed for doing what comes naturally — looking for food and protecting their young.

Before we exterminate what’s left of all God’s creatures great and small by 2050 we need an attitude transformation. We need to think about what it will be like in a world where we’ve killed everyone else.

Pause for thought.

Time’s up.

Then we need to call off the hunt and start doing what we can to encourage the revitalization of the wild. On the North Shore, we have a unique opportunity as the last sentinels of the frontier to lead the way.

We can begin by implementing a policy that reserves killing as a last, instead of the first, resort. It may be inconvenient for the conservation service to drive all those hungry bears around the province over and over again, but after killing 4,000 of their brothers and sisters just for fun (er, sport) every year, it’s the least we can do.

If it were up to me, I’d eliminate the bear hunt too, but one voice crying at the edge of the wilderness doesn’t amount to much against the firepower of the hunting hobby lobby. The thing is, eliminating the hunt makes good dollars and cents.

A few years ago, an organization called Center for Responsible Travel figured that bear viewing in the Great Bear Rain Forest created 12 times more economic activity than bear hunting. I suggest that gap will spread as B.C. becomes, by default, one of the last, if not the last, wild places on earth, where you can still watch Baloo and Akela do their thing.

So while we still can, let’s stop killing bears (and all their fellow woodland creatures) as a solution. There are other, better ways to coexist with the animals.

Ways that emphasize “exist.”

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