

Grizzlies face extinction from

In British Columbia's Khutzeymateen Valley, surveyor's lines and logging roads may soon intersect the well worn paths that grizzly bears have etched in the mossy forest floor over the course of centuries. Even as environmentalists lobby to have this pristine west coast valley designated as Canada's first grizzly bear sanctuary, logging companies are exerting pressure on the B.C. government to open the valley to logging. Considering the government's track record with respect to ecological issues, it is no wonder that many environmentalists fear the worst.

Northwestern Canada and Alaska are the last strongholds of the North American grizzly bear. Canada presently harbours about 20,000 grizzlies, or approximately one-third to one-half of this continent's population. The province of British Columbia, which offers the greatest variety of grizzly habitats in North America, is home to 6,600 bears.

According to Wayne McCrory, a wildlife biologist who has spent much of the last seven years studying the grizzlies of the Khutzeymateen Valley first-hand, there were probably 175,000 grizzlies ranging from Mexico to the Arctic Ocean when the first Europeans arrived in North America. Since the early 1800's that number has dwindled to about 50,000. Grizzlies have been virtually exterminated in America's lower 48 states, where only 900 bears remain of an original population estimated at 100,000. "We've done a great job of destroying them, killing them outright by hunting or else destroying their habitat. The grizzly isn't a threatened species in Canada or Alaska, but the pressure on it is unrelenting. It's outrageous: here we have one of the most magnificent of animals, popular throughout the world as a symbol of the great Canadian wilderness, and yet we seem determined to eliminate it. Canada has about half the bears, the largest range and the greatest grizzly habitat in North America, but there isn't a single sanctuary for them in the entire country. By comparison, Alaska, which understands the value of what it's got, has at least three."

The Khutzeymateen, a virgin valley just

40 km (25 miles) north of Prince Rupert, is probably the best candidate for a grizzly sanctuary in British Columbia. As many as 50 coastal grizzlies range over the 39,000 hectare (90,000 acre) Khutzeymateen River watershed. This is a significant concentration, as grizzly bears tend to be solitary animals requiring large home ranges, the sizes of which vary depending on the food supply.

In 1972, the United Nations International Biological Program, which was established to identify regions of exceptional biological value, recognized the Khutzeymateen as an area of international merit — a place whose natural wildlife values make preservation preferable to resource extraction. The valley was also singled out as the only site in B.C. with "significant" grizzly reserve potential. In that same year a proposal was made to have the Khutzeymateen set aside as a B.C. Ecological Reserve to protect the valley's grizzly population for the purposes of conservation and scientific study. Since that time, there has been conflict over the best system of land-use for the valley.

The Khutzeymateen Valley is a wild and solitary place of ancient forests, shifting rock, and driving weather that has remained untouched since the glaciers or the last ice age receded 10,000 years ago. The Khutzeymateen River bisects a lush forest of giant Sitka spruce, Red cedar, and Western hemlock before emptying into a long, deep Pacific fjord. There, where the river meets the ocean at a pristine tidal estuary teeming



Under the sa

BY ROBERT JOBST
Layout by Winston Pei.

with marine life and migratory waterfowl, most of the valley's 20 to 50 coastal grizzlies congregate in early August to gorge themselves on spawning salmon. The valley (pronounced "KOOT-suh-mah-teen") was named generations ago by the Tsimpsean Indians as "a confined place of fish and bears."

The grizzlies emerge in the spring from their dens in the high country and make their way down along well established trails to the avalanche paths and the estuary, where they feed on sedges, grasses, and other succulent vegetation. As spring progresses, Lady Rern, Skunk Cabbage roots, Salmonberries, and Red osier dogwood become major dietary items. Then, in August, the salmon (pink, chum, chinook, and coho) begin their various spawning runs, and, for the bears, the feasting begins.

Owing to this abundance of high protein food, coastal grizzly bears are larger than the grizzlies of the interior — up to 450 kg (1000 lbs.) for adult males. Also, their coats are generally a more uniform brown than the darker, often "silver-tipped", colouring of the interior grizzly, and therefore they are sometimes referred to as brown bears.

The Khutzeymateen's rugged geology has so far discouraged logging of what is

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