



THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE  
**PROTECTION**  
of Fur-Bearing Animals

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**SERVICE & POLICY COMPLAINT**

**Background:**

The Conservation Officer Service responded to a sow bear and her three cubs that had reportedly accessed berries, a natural food source, from several mountain ash trees in a residential area of Creekside on Monday, October 8, 2018.

To relocate the bears a short distance away, the attending officer intentionally treed the bears to immobilize them. Once “contained”, the immobilized sow subsequently fell to her death, orphaning the remaining cubs.

October 11, 2018: Bear dies in fall from tree after being tranquilized by COS

<https://www.piquenewsmagazine.com/whistler/bear-dies-in-fall-from-tree-after-being-euthanized-by-cos/Content?oid=11198272>

Our Complaints:

1. **Conservation officers are not adequately equipped or trained to ensure the safety of wildlife and the humane treatment of wildlife.**
  - a. **It is negligent to put an officer in the field with tranquilizer guns but without safety nets or other non-lethal options to protect immobilized wildlife.**
    - i. According to the COS document Preventing & Responding to Conflicts with Large Predators (2016): *“Non-lethal control of bears including short distance relocation (i.e. <10km, within home range), hazing, aversive conditioning and on-site soft and hard release will primarily be used in community that have been formally designated as “Bear Smart”. **Officers must be trained and equipped to deliver non-lethal control.**”*

It is clear in this case the officer was not adequately equipped or trained to protect the bear he immobilized.
  - b. **It is negligent for Provincial veterinarians (through their licenses) to dispense immobilization drugs for use when the substances result in the death of animals.**
    - i. According to Preventing & Responding to Conflicts with Large Predators (2016): *“**Animal care should meet or exceed accepted standards, including methods of capture, immobilization, handling, and transportation, release, and during delivery of any method of hazing or aversive conditioning.**”*
  - c. **The COS was aware of the risks involved when working with immobilized bears.** This isn’t the first time a bear died or was injured during immobilization under the COS’ care:

## Examples:

July 28, 2016 – Bear cub dies after being captured

<https://www.piquenewsmagazine.com/whistler/bear-cub-dies-after-being-captured-during-whistler-ironman/Content?oid=2798228>

May 30, 2017 – Bear cub shot with tranquilizer, falls through shed roof

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bear-scare-in-burnaby-1.4137525>

- d. **While media coverage states the COS has ordered a catch net, this action comes too little too late. Catch nets have been available for many years and successfully implemented in other jurisdictions.**

*Missoula, Montana (article published March 21, 2012)*

Demonstrates how a net can be used to catch falling bears.

[https://missoulian.com/news/local/bear-conflicts-a-continentwide-challenge/article\\_e43cde58-72fc-11e1-9be3-0019bb2963f4.html#ixzz1pu0t5mfi](https://missoulian.com/news/local/bear-conflicts-a-continentwide-challenge/article_e43cde58-72fc-11e1-9be3-0019bb2963f4.html#ixzz1pu0t5mfi)

*Renton, Washington (article published March 8, 2013):*

Demonstrates that bears can be caught with net, or in this case, they used a modified parachute.

<https://komonews.com/archive/crews-free-bear-trapped-high-up-renton-tree-11-22-2015>

*Boulder, Colorado (article published July 11, 2015)*

A net was used to catch a falling bear. The article went viral, demonstrating positive media coverage for the local wildlife service.

[https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/falling-bear-colorado-university\\_n\\_7776540](https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/falling-bear-colorado-university_n_7776540)

*Durham, Ontario (article published July 13, 2018)*

Despite the bear being high up the tree, respondents to this incident used a pole, tranquilizer dart and a tarp. This incident happened just recently and demonstrates that in other jurisdictions in Canada, there are efforts to use tarps/nets.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/4329631/port-perry-bear-sighting/>

## **2. The COS' own policy would have allowed those remaining cubs to go to rehabilitation, instead they were abandoned.**

*Section 3.7(b) of Preventing and Responding to Conflicts with Large Carnivores...*

### *(b) Black Bears*

*i) Provided that permitted rearing facilities can provide adequate facilities to rear, release and monitor bears, consideration should be given to the rearing and release of orphaned Black Bear young of the year that are considered suitable candidates.*

*ii) In order to be considered as candidates for rearing and release:*

- Any Black Bear young of the year found without its mother must not be assumed to be orphaned and should be given every reasonable opportunity, or 48 hours, to re-join its mother.*
- Only young of the year are candidates. Orphaned yearling Black Bears will be left in the wild.*
- Young of the year must be in good health (of adequate size for that age class with no serious injuries or obvious illnesses), and*

- *Young of the year must not display high levels of habituation to humans or conditioning to human food sources. If there are any questions regarding the physical or behavioural condition of the bear the Wildlife Veterinarian or FLNRO regional/headquarters biologists will be contacted for advice.*

*iii) Young of the year that are brought to rearing centres must be examined by a veterinarian, after which FLNRO regional staff, in discussion with the facility, will decide whether the young of the year should be euthanized or reared by the rearing facility for later winter or summer release.*

*iv) Adequate and suitable facilities must be available at a rehabilitation centre that meet provincial standards for the rearing of bear young of the year for release into the wild.*

## **Conclusion**

The unnecessary suffering and death of this sow was preventable, particularly with a basic understanding of bear behaviour, a history of such actions, and the availability of tools to prevent severe trauma or death following immobilization. There was too much at risk to her and her three tiny cubs, especially when human safety was never at risk.

Furthermore, the subsequent media and social media coverage of this incident undermines the public's trust in the Conservation Officer Service, which can create further consequences in the public's reluctance to report incidents.

## **Recommendations**

- Create a general order that all conservation officers are required to carry and use safety nets for treed animals, or instruct they are required to remain on site and wait for the bear to come down from the tree where he/she can be moved out of the area using non-lethal tactics. A treed bear or bear family is of no risk to the public. If there is any concern for public safety or costs, a trained volunteer could attend the area below the tree and keep the family from leaving until nightfall.
- All COS vehicles should be equipped with safety nets or at the very minimum, each community should have access to a safety net. Officers should receive training on how to properly set up and capture an immobilized or treed bear using a net without injury.
- Institute third-party or independent oversight body with full public transparency for anytime an animal is injured or killed directly by or through the actions of an officer, with the authority to recommend policy changes and punitive actions.
- Create a general order to not interfere with a mother (with cubs of the year) when they are not a threat to public safety or property, particularly between October and May.
- Establish acceptable weight for cubs to be a minimum of 70 pounds if released into wild without their mother. This would require a change in the Policy to amend the subjective "of adequate size" to "a minimum of 70 pounds".