

By Larry Thiessen

On January 15th, 1999 the anglers and hunters of Canada were issued a deafening wake-up call -- the day the government of our largest province leaped into the bottomless void that is inevitable in trying to appease the animal rights activists. The acceptance of the animal rights irrational reasoning has rarely been more blatant. For example, the statement by the Ontario Natural Resources Minister in a government news release refers to "young bears and their mothers". This is a favourite tactic of those opposed to hunting; instead of using proper terminology "cubs and sows" they use words that are generally reflective and indicative of the human species. To the many Canadians isolated and removed from the natural world these phrases subconsciously invoke feelings of artificial compassion, of equating animals with themselves. The identical modus operandi is used when these groups attack animal husbandry, medical research and wearing of leather products among others on their formidable agenda.

"The government made the decision to move to end the spring bear hunt because it will not tolerate cubs being orphaned by hunters mistakenly shooting mother bears in the spring." What a statement! This is the true wake-up call! A decision made by those entrusted to manage the wildlife on our behalf based on "a mistake". Mistakes by hunters have now apparently become unacceptable, and must therefore lead to legislation as punishment. It leaves me to wonder at the perfectness of the offending government officials and their cohorts, the animal rights activists.

Hunters have never made claims of perfection with regards to the spring bear hunt and we acknowledge and accept the responsibility that, unfortunately and regrettably, some cubs will be orphaned. I would, in that same vein, ask that those responsible for ending the hunt also accept the accountability that comes with their actions. Ontario has one of the largest black bear populations in North America, estimated at 75,000 to 100,000 animals. Approximately 4,000 bears are harvested by hunters every spring, and according to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources about 270 cubs are orphaned. Of the bears taken 72-73% are boars, again according to biologists and the majority of the rest dry sows and sows with cubs from the previous year, still nursing occasionally, but quite capable of fending on their own. In the idyllic, dream world of the animal rights movement it may be inconceivable that nature can be this cruel and bloodthirsty, but the fact is those 3,000 boars are more than willing and capable of resorting to cannibalism and making a meal of any cubs that cross their path, particularly in the spring. If this is a responsibility issue, who will step forward and claim the responsibility for those cannibalistic deaths that could have been avoided, and will there be 270 killed, or will there be more?

Common sense seems to becoming an unfamiliar concept when those opposed to hunting and those who participate in the activity collide. The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters made a number of common sense suggestions and one in particular was unfortunately disregarded. They suggested that the spring hunt continue but that hunters be required to place baits off the ground, making it necessary for the bear to reach for the bait, giving the hunter a better view to

determine the gender. Simple and sensible, but in an environment that abhors solutions beyond the intended abolition, regrettably unheard.

Anglers and hunters of Canada - wake-up! The alarm has sounded, don't touch that snooze button, a few more minutes and you may not have to bother getting up at all.