



FOR RELEASE  
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## **Orphaned Yukon bear cubs to move to the Calgary Zoo**

WHITEHORSE—The male and female black bear cubs temporarily living at the Yukon Wildlife Preserve will be moving to Alberta to a permanent home with the Calgary Zoo.

"The Government of Yukon appreciates the generous offer of the Calgary Zoo because we know the cubs will be safe and well cared for in their world-class facility," Minister of Environment Currie Dixon said.

The Department of Environment and the zoo are working together to safely transport the cubs by air to Calgary. The welfare of the two is the top priority. Once they arrive in Calgary, the cubs will be placed under quarantine where their health status and needs will be assessed.

"We are so pleased to be able to welcome these two cubs to the Calgary Zoo," Calgary Zoo curator Jamie Dorgan said. "As young black bears are social in their first few years of life, we are delighted to have found companions for our lone bear Manuka and are optimistic introductions will be successful. Together, these three will be able to educate our visitors about the dangers of bears becoming habituated to humans."

Minister Dixon acknowledged the special role of the Yukon Wildlife Preserve as the temporary home for the cubs: "The Department of Environment values the extra effort made by staff at the preserve to house and care for the cubs. This falls outside their mandate of offering unparalleled wildlife viewing and photo opportunities, yet it was done thoughtfully and well."

The cubs were orphaned in mid-July. Their mother had discovered unsecured garbage and compost bins in a Whitehorse neighbourhood and had to be dispatched when she became a threat to public safety.

The Calgary Zoo is western Canada's largest zoo and is accredited by the American and Canadian Zoo associations. It is currently home to more than 120 species, one third of them are part of a Species Survival Plan for endangered and at-risk species.

**See backgrounder.**

### **Learn more:**

Calgary Zoo  
Yukon Wildlife Preserve

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### **Backgrounder: Orphaned Yukon bear cubs to move to the Calgary Zoo**

In June, a black bear sow with two cubs began frequenting the Hamilton Boulevard extension area to graze on dandelions and other natural foods. Unfortunately, they eventually discovered unsecured garbage/compost bins in the nearby Copper Ridge neighbourhood. As a result, on July 2 the family unit was live-trapped and relocated to the other side of the Yukon River, in a wilderness area about 70 km away.

Environment Yukon staff chose this site because they were concerned that the cubs would die if the bears were moved too far away from their "home range." While they expected the bears would return to Copper Ridge, it was thought that by the time they got back there would be an adequate supply of natural food available, e.g. ripe berries. It would be easier to then work on "pushing" the bears off garbage and onto natural food. Environment Yukon staff tracked the bear family's movements through Whitehorse by relying on sightings.

Conservation Officers (CO) were called out early in the morning of July 15 to deal with a black bear that was aggressively getting into garbage/compost in Copper Ridge. Two attempts to "haze" the bear away from the scene using rubber bullets were made. When the bear, which appeared to be a subadult male, made persistent attempts to get into a resident's domestic garbage bins, the attending CO destroyed the bear. No cubs were present at the time. It was only when the carcass was examined that COs discovered the bear to have been a lactating female. There were no signs of this earlier. Efforts were then made to locate the cubs and capture them. This was done later that same day.

Environment Yukon staff took the cubs to the Yukon Wildlife Preserve (YWP) as an interim measure. The preserve does not house large carnivores in the long term, but in this case developed a solution to allow for short-term care with minimal human contact.

It is the department's practice to "leave the wild in the wild." When cubs are orphaned in the wilderness, typically as a result of a defense-of-life-and-property shooting, they are left to fend for themselves. In extenuating circumstances, other solutions may be sought.

In the case of these two cubs, they were orphaned in a residential subdivision. Leaving them there was not a safe or humane option.

The male and female cubs appeared to be healthy when captured, yet within 10 days both began to show signs of illness which Environment Yukon staff were treating with antibiotics. The cubs were doing well and appear to be almost completely recovered; the department issued a media advisory on August 7 to this effect. The cubs' health will continue to be monitored; it is possible the illness was related to stress experienced due to the loss of their mother and to being confined.

The department recognizes that there are many considerations involved when moving wildlife between jurisdictions. We must respect the terms set by the organization that is prepared to accept Yukon animals.

Environment Yukon staff initially pursued the option of having the cubs go to a bear rehabilitation centre in BC, where they could gain weight and overwinter safely before being returned to Yukon. However, only BC bears are accepted.

On July 29 the Calgary Zoo indicated interest in obtaining the cubs. Once Environment Yukon staff along with the Calgary Zoo's Animal Care team determined the zoo would be suitable for the cubs, the process began to draw up the wildlife import (Alberta) and export (Yukon) permits and prepare for the transfer.

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