Facebook campaign to save Canadian bears caught in drug bust

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A black bear scavenges for food. An international campaign with the help of social networking site Facebook hopes to save the lives of some 14 black bears used to guard an illegal marijuana farm in western Canada.

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Police encountered the bears during a drug raid earlier this month at Christina Lake in remote southeastern British Columbia.

Sergeant Fred Mansveld told AFP police believe the bears were lured to the property with dog food so they would ward off unwanted visitors.

If the bears have lost the ability to feed themselves in the wild, say police

and conservation officers, they could turn dangerous and may have to be killed.

By Tuesday more than 3,200 people had signed two online petitions asking the province of British Columbia to move the bears to a more remote area, or place them in a sanctuary.

"The world over is watching!" wrote Maria Burns, one of more than 2,000 followers on a Facebook page, "Help Save the BC Black Bears." "My parents in SW Scotland were most concerned to hear about this via National radio and TV news in UK. They will be hoping for a good outcome for these bears."

The family of Canadian-American actor Jason Priestley donated 1,250 dollars to set up a fund to help pay for the bears‘ needs.

"If we can save these bears that's the short term, but long term, if we can improve awareness," the actor's father Lorne Priestley told AFP.

"When you have some (expletive) like these guys at Christina Lake that feed the bears, and habituate them to being fed by humans, it's a form of maltreatment," said Priestley, who lives in metropolitan Vancouver.

"We just feel the bears shouldn't be punished for something the people are doing."

Police said they are investigating drug charges against two residents of the property, while conservation officer Dave Webster told AFP he is investigating wildlife violations.

It is against provincial law to feed wildlife, or leave out food where wild animals can access it, because animals that become used to being around people turn dangerous and may be destroyed, said Webster.

Provincial spokesmen have said the bears are no longer being fed and officials are monitoring whether the animals can fend for themselves in the wild, or seek food from other people.

In the past three years, 1,264 black bears were destroyed because of bear-human conflicts in British Columbia, a provincial spokesman told AFP.

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