

MEETING SUMMARY
Wolverine Creek Management Committee
April 3, 2004, 9:30 AM. – 5:30 PM
Cook Inlet Aquaculture, Kenai

Meeting Participants

Facilitator: Lisa O'Brien, *Recorder:* Teri Arnold

Committee Members: Mark Glassmaker, Peter Thompson, Fred Hirschman, Jeremy Schimmel, Mike Cowan, Steve Stringham, Alan Helfer /Alternates not seated at the table: Mark Bell, Carl Dixon

ADF&G Staff: Sport Fish Division: Wayne Dolezal, Mark Burch; Dave Rutz, Dave Ryland **Division of Wildlife Conservation:** Jeff Hughes, Colleen Matt, Joe Meehan, John Hechtel, Teri Arnold

Guest Presenter: Charles T. Robbins, Professor with Washington State University

Meeting Purpose

To review and implement solutions to issues relating to the 6 management objectives of the Wolverine Creek Management Committee

Introductions, Overview, Agenda and Ground Rules Review

Committee members, the guest speaker, staff, and members of the public were introduced. Lisa reviewed the agenda and ground rules. Lisa added that the information she obtained from the pre-meeting telephone interviews with committee members and alternates would be shared with the group.

Review of Committee Purpose and Accomplishments

Jeff Hughes reviewed the Wolverine Creek Management Committee's purpose and accomplishments thus far. He told the group it was important they understand that ADF&G values them as stakeholders and values experiential knowledge at Wolverine Creek, which is one reason why the WCMC was formed. He stated that ADF&G must also use other tools such as research to gather information. He reminded the group that management is striving to be proactive and not reactive and not wait until there's a problem before deciding to act. He listed some of the possible problems that may arise for consideration in creating preventative measures:

- Salmon run is not sustainable (then Sport Fish might have to step in and regulate)
- Habituated bears don't return
- Lakeside fish-rearing habitat erodes
- Bear/human encounter causes injury

Lisa pointed out that combining experience and science results in good decisions.

Review of WCMC and Alternates Pre-meeting Telephone Interviews

Lisa recapped the information she had received from WCMC members and alternates in her telephone interviews prior to the meeting. She was able to interview all of the committee members, and all of the alternates with the exceptions of Mark Bell and Judd Manuel.

Question 1: What can be done to keep viewable bears in the future?

- Setback Recommendation:
 - 4 Yes: Better for bears and habitat
 - 2 Undecided: need more information
 - 6 No: Nothing is broken, affects fishing
- Kinds of information needed?
 - A. Biologists
 - B. Research
 - C. Experience in the room

Question 2: Future management of Wolverine Creek and declining State revenues.

- User fee necessary or a good idea?
 - 11 Yes
 - 1 No
- Who should pay if a user fee is instituted?

The majority said all should pay. Various members suggested that all visitors, including the unguided public should pay. Commercial operators should pay also.
- Who should collect fees?

There were a variety of suggestions for methods of collection. It seemed more important to the group to make the collection process easy for the visitors and the commercial operators. Many suggested that commercial operators collect fees from their guided clients and pay per head at the end of the summer with their end-of-season use report. The unguided public could use an “iron ranger” or pay staff directly at a central area. One person suggested that boats stored at the site be “taxed.” Another member thought we should try to tap into a corporate sponsor. Another suggested a stamp to be affixed to fishing licenses.
- How should fees be used?

Most members downplayed any needs for facilities on the site, saying that they preferred the wilderness setting. One suggested that the money be used to manage the sockeye fishery more closely. Others felt that the latrine was worth supporting with the user fees. Other suggestions included portable lockers for boat storage, a bigger boat storage area, support for WCMC meetings, and extended research on bears in the Cove.

More than a few suggested that the money be used to develop habitat protection around the boat storage areas. This may include the development of light-penetrating walkways, a floating dock, and/or centralizing the boat storage area. The group definitely didn’t want plane tie-downs.

Question 3: Ideas about the habitat impact of boat storage around the margins of the lake.

- Take boats out each year
 - Limit boats to 10, check in/out
 - Have commercial users build boat storage building.
- (Note that after a group discussion the above three ideas were all crossed off the list.)

Question 4: Is there a safety concern about planes parked in the cove?

- Lisa explained that there were mixed reaction to this question.
- Some said yes, there were “hot-doggers” in the cove and to limit planes.
 - Some said no, to use common sense.
 - One said there was a concern about rock(s) in the water.

Management Objectives and Criteria for Success

Colleen shared handouts of “Criteria for Success” and “Management Objectives.” Each of the 6 management objectives was reviewed separately. For Objectives 2, 3, 4, and 5, Lisa recapped the input received from WCMC members and alternates during her pre-meeting telephone interviews with individuals. The 6 management objectives for Wolverine Creek were developed from state law, regulations, and the Redoubt Bay Critical Habitat Area Management Plan. At the spring WCMC meeting, the department presented the Criteria for Success for achieving each of the management objectives.

1. *No food-conditioning of bears*

In general, this objective is being met except for a few incidences of cleaning fish and discarding viscera. If food is to be on board, use caution when eating food in boats, and keep all foodstuffs in coolers. Jeremy suggested that everyone tighten up practices here with regard to food around bears and put attention into a more coordinated effort. He suggested that everyone on board fishes at the same time, and then moves boats away from the fishing to hole to eat, thus making fishing and eating separate activities.

2. *Minimize displacement of bears during summer*

Redefine Criterion “Number of bears using Wolverine Creek.”

Colleen reviewed a change that was suggested at the last WCMC meeting. A better criterion was needed to evaluate success at meeting this objective. ADF&G came up with “Number of live fish captured in the cove by individual bears.” This will be a more valid measure of whether or not bears are being displaced if other factors such as availability of fish are taken into consideration.

Adoption of management guideline regarding following bears around lake.

At the last WCMC meeting the group asked ADF&G to draft a guideline for following bears around the lake with a goal to avoid displacing bears. The following guideline was submitted for the group’s approval:

When viewing bears outside of the inner cove, boats should follow these guidelines:

- 1. Do not approach closer than 40 feet (about 2 boat lengths);*
- 2. Avoid the path of the moving bear;*
- 3. Do not pursue a moving bear; and*
- 4. Move very slowly or shut off the boat engine completely.*

Alan suggested that we delete #3 of this guideline. John Hechtel suggested instead, a change to “don’t harass or pursue bears.” Another person suggested that there should be more definition here to keep people from moving in front of bears and causing bears to change their path. Ideas such as “do not harass or cause a bear to move, “not harass or chase a bear in a way to cause a bear to change it’s path” were suggested.

Decision: The group was okay with a change to number 3 and prefers the wording “do not harass or cause a bear to move.” The new guideline will read as follows:

When viewing bears outside of the inner cove, boats should follow these guidelines:

- 1. Do not approach closer than 40 feet (about 2 boat lengths);**
- 2. Avoid the path of the moving bear;**
- 3. Do not harass or cause a bear to move; and**
- 4. Move very slowly or shut off the boat engine completely.**

WSU presentation

Charlie Robbins of Washington State University presented the results of the research study conducted last season by Troy Tollefson, also of Washington State University, regarding bear displacement in the cove. Charlie apologized for Troy’s absence and explained that Troy had recently received a serious medical diagnosis and was undergoing further diagnostic testing. Members asked many questions about how the data were collected and analyzed.

The PowerPoint slides from this presentation can be obtained by contacting ADF&G.

Guideline proposal

Colleen Matt told the group that based on the data and analysis of the research, and the management objectives for Wolverine Creek, Fish and Game proposed a 10-meter setback to allow bears unimpeded access to the cove. Boats would not be allowed in the 10-meter area but anglers could cast into the area when bears were not present. The measure for success would be comparison of the number of live fish captured in the cove by individual bears. This would be compared with similar data gathered during the 2-year study. The proposed guideline would address 3 main concerns:

1. Are Wolverine Creek bears getting enough nutrition to keep them coming back?
2. Can we sustain bear viewing and at what level?
3. Is the level of bear disturbance a safety issue?

The group engaged in discussion, and the comments were many and varied. Many questions centered on the validity or limitation of the data presented. Some members agreed with the proposal as long as anglers could cast into the 10-meter area.

Other members were not in favor of the buffer. One member said that Wolverine Creek is unique in it’s proximity to the Kenai Peninsula, low cost, long and early fishing season and the priority should be on fishing not bear viewing. Another member objected that the guideline would cause crowding among boats leading to conflicts among anglers, which would also cause more violations. An attendee said that he thought there were high numbers of fish currently caught in the setback zone and that fishing would be poor. Jeremy said that he pulls out of the zone when bears come anyway because his clients can’t cast when a bear is nearby anyway.

A few members objected to the guideline because they thought it was too proactive (i.e., that there were plenty of bears to watch now and we shouldn’t do anything until there is a problem). They said that, for them, self-regulation is working. Nature will show them when there is a problem and, for them, the data don’t give a reason to change.

Other members responded, saying that the WCMC is shortsighted if they don't accept the proposal. The data show that if boats move back, more bears will move into the area. Another member felt that the committee was ignoring the State's recommendation.

Another person thought that the 10-meter line did not include the boulders where bears congregate on rocks. This would make things worse because guides would be crowded closer to the boulders and displace bears.

Several suggestions were made: 1) close cove to all boat and plane activity from 10 pm to 7 am to allow bears to fish; 2) maintain the status quo in the cove; 3) reduce the fish take to 2 per day on a voluntary basis; 4) add an alternative guideline to respect bear's space and to cease fishing and pull boats back if a bear is in 10-meter area (i.e., remain 10 meters from bear actively in each zone; and 5) the committee should adopt the guideline for 2 or 3 weeks on a trial basis.

A member said that he favored the proposal but wanted escapement figures for the summer that he could correlate with the number and presence of the bears. Another member summarized the group's feelings saying that the buffer zone may bring more bears into the cove, but anglers see this as a loss of fishing opportunity.

A straw vote was taken and results were 2 members for the 10-Meter Setback Proposal and 4 against it. But, they suggested an alternate guideline and that should be evaluated in the fall meeting and correlated with escapement information. ADF&G staff told the group that the Setback Proposal may be brought up again by ADF&G.

Three members (Schimmel, Glassmaker, and Hirschman) drafted an alternative guideline during a break in the meeting. They brought it back to the group who then made slight edits. The following was accepted as the new guideline:

When bears are present and fishing within 10 meters of Wolverine Creek, all boats within this 10-meter zone must make a reasonable effort to move back sufficient distance to allow bears to fish unimpeded. When bears are actively fishing on the rocks, stay at least 10 feet away.

3. Minimize negative impacts to fish and wildlife habitat

How do we reduce habitat impacts of boat storage and maintain safe operations?

Joe Meehan led a discussion on reducing impacts of boat storage on habitat. The boats are spreading out again and more linear feet of the lakeshore is getting impacted. He asked the group for their suggested solutions. The following list was generated:

- ⇒ The reason some operators are spreading out is due partly to safety concerns about wind conditions for takeoffs and landings.
- ⇒ It was suggested that operators and permit-holders off-load and on-load on the water. However, others objected that this process was dangerous, especially in foul weather.
- ⇒ We should limit the number of boat storage permits.
- ⇒ Perhaps multiple parking areas would be better than one to disperse the damage. However, biologists disagreed with this strategy saying that removal of lakeshore plants over a greater area impacts more fish-rearing habitat.
- ⇒ Perhaps there are erosion stabilization products that would help rehabilitate the impacts.
- ⇒ Another solution would be light-penetrating walkways (possibly placed by non-profit groups).
- ⇒ The group asked Wayne Dolezal for his recommendations. He suggested looking for the best locations for light-penetrating walkways and using floating docks.

Decision: The WCMC selected 2 members to work with Fish and Game to develop recommendations on how to reduce impact of boats and people on the shoreline to bring to the Fall 2004 meeting. Members selected were Peter Thomson, Fred Hirschmann, and Alan Helfer may also help.

Discussion of options to move or improve the outhouse.

Some ideas discussed were:

- ⇒ Electric fence around the existing location, however there was concern for overuse and degradation of the trail.
- ⇒ Moving to a new location near the eagle nest, with a concern here of whether it would be used this far away. Some said there were less bears here so that even being further away it would still get used
- ⇒ Propane incinerating toilet – is very expensive and need to be bear-proffed.

Decision:

To keep the outhouse at its current location and put an electric fence around it and the trail.

4. Maintain recreational opportunities in a high-quality environment

Future management of Wolverine Creek and declining state revenues.

Jeff Hughes talked to the group about the current state of the budget and indicated that there would likely be some kind of user fee for the area initiated for the 2005 season. A discussion followed of who should pay fees and how they should be collected. It was agreed that all who use the area should pay, but there were many ideas about who should collect the fees. These ideas are as follows:

A. Who should collect fees?

1. Public
 - a. Stamp purchased from ADF&G (not vendor)
 - b. Iron Ranger
 - c. Carl's lodge could be a vendor
2. Commercial
 - a. Boat Tax
 - b. Stamp on license
 - c. 135 seasonal fee based on volume
 - d. Per person visitor
 - e. Trip broker

B. How should fees be used?

- a. Follow-up research on some of the ideas suggested from the Washington State University research study.
- b. Fishery monitoring and enhancement.
- c. Use to support WCMC meetings.

5. Promote public safety

Safety of planes in the cove

Colleen Matt led a discussion regarding safety of the planes in the cove. The group felt there were no real problems or concerns in this area.

6. Minimize conflicts among visitors

Additional criterion to measure success

To better measure whether we are meeting this management objective, we will conduct a random survey of Wolverine Creek visitors. This will be reviewed more at the fall 2004 meeting.

The Committee indicated that they wanted to discuss the process of boats rotating in a line (i.e., the “hog line”) in the cove and how this can be done fairly for all users.

Both of the above topics will be taken up as part of the agenda for the Fall 2004 meeting.

Miscellaneous Topics

We briefly discussed the Wolverine Creek guide packets that were sent out in the spring. Everyone believed that they were valuable and we should continue sending them out to new guides as well as sending updates to returning guides. We also discussed the need to fill out the annual guide report forms as they provide valuable information to ADF&G and the WCMC.

A guide training program for all Wolverine Creek guides will be discussed more in the fall.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Wolverine Creek Management Committee will take place in Anchorage sometime during the first week in October. The specific date, time, and location will be announced later in the summer.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 PM.