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Advisory Announcement

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Suitable Placement not Found for Bear Cubs

(Fairbanks) – Two grizzly bear cubs born this year and orphaned in Deadhorse were euthanized Wednesday. After an exhaustive search, a suitable placement at an accredited facility that could care for the cubs was not found. The cubs were living on their own in the Deadhorse area for over a week, becoming habituated to people and surviving on garbage. Their health was also compromised without care from the mother whom biologists believe had died.

ADF&G follows specific protocols for the humane handling of wildlife, including orphaned bear cubs. ADF&G staff were present in Deadhorse in late June and confirmed the cubs were orphaned. With the assistance of Alaska Clean Seas personnel in Deadhorse they captured the cubs, held them temporarily at the ACS facility in Deadhorse, and assessed their health while seeking suitable placement for them. ADF&G personnel then transported the cubs to a temporary holding facility under the care of a wildlife veterinarian in Palmer until a final decision on placement could be made.

While placing a bear in a zoo is a preferred alternative, accredited zoos and wildlife facilities capable of housing bears generally already have them. Grizzly bears can potentially live more than 30 years in captivity.

Biological specimens were collected from the two bears and their hides and skeleton were given to the University of Alaska Museum of the North mammal collection for future scientific studies.

Grizzly bear cubs of this age cannot survive alone in the wild; therefore, they could not have been relocated to another area of the North Slope. They are not capable of finding natural food on their own and they are vulnerable to predation. Together with their mother, the cubs had spent the previous month in Deadhorse, eating garbage. This situation set the stage for the animals to become habituated to human presence and to rely on garbage as their food source.

Experience from similar situations in the past leads agency staff to conclude that as the cubs grow older they will potentially break into buildings, and pose a safety risk to people. Once a bear becomes human-habituated and food-conditioned there is not a lot of recourse to solve the problem and the animals become dangerous. Agency personnel have had to lethally remove nine adults and two cubs in Deadhorse over the past 20 years because they caused conflicts with humans.

“The only way to prevent incidents like this is for people to stop placing food waste in unsecured garbage bins, truck beds, or other non-bearproof containers,” said Dick Shideler, a state wildlife biologist who has studied oilfield bears for more than 20 years. “If not, grizzly bears will continue to be attracted to the area and more lethal removals may be required.”

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