

MEETING SUMMARY
Wolverine Creek Management Committee

Wednesday, May 7, 2003
Aspen Hotel, Soldotna

Meeting participants

Committee members: Joe Schuster, Lance DeSaw, Fred Hirschmann, Alan Helfer, Peter Thomson, Carl Dixon, Jeremy Schimmel

Meeting attendees: Tom Thibodeau, Steve Stringham, Leona Oberts (phone), Mark Carr, Ed Spracher, Mike Cowan, Craig Schwitser, Bill Davis, Greg Bell, Mark Bell, Rex Bennett, Lani Eggertsen-Goff, John Czarneski, Pete Heppe, Ted Spraker, Kim Wannamaker, Mitch Langseth, Shelly Helfer

ADF&G staff: Cindi Loker, Jeff Hughes, Colleen Matt, Joe Meehan, Gino Del Frate, Dave Rutz, Doug Hill

Meeting purpose

To provide an update on Wolverine Creek issues; to discuss comments on and finalize the voluntary guidelines; to identify monitoring strategies; and to discuss evaluation criteria for the guidelines.

Welcome and opening remarks

Lisa O'Brien welcomed everyone. The members of the Wolverine Creek Management Committee (WCMC), the public, and staff introduced themselves.

Jeff Hughes gave opening remarks and reminded the WCMC that its purpose is to agree on voluntary guidelines and work with ADF&G and users of the Wolverine Creek area to ensure compliance with the guidelines. Jeff reviewed the management objectives and stressed that ADF&G wanted to involve users of the area to make it a better place for everyone.

Lisa reviewed the agenda and ground rules.

Review and updates

Gino Del Frate briefed the group on a regulatory change regarding brown bear hunting season in Unit 16B, including the Wolverine Creek area. He said that ADF&G suggested, and the Board of Game (BOG) passed a proposal extending the brown bear season in Unit 16B to May 31. The purpose was to streamline regulations in neighboring subunits.

In addition, two members of the public, Maureen Caires and Amy Shapiro, proposed closing portions of Unit 16B to brown bear hunting to protect Wolverine Creek bears. ADF&G recommended that the BOG only affect an area around the mouth of Wolverine Creek and delay the opening until September. The BOG chose to delay the opening of brown bear hunting season to September 15 but only for a one mile buffer zone around the mouth of Wolverine Creek. Black bear season and all other hunting regulations were not affected.

A sign will be placed near the mouth of Wolverine Creek, so both hunters and other users that access the area will be aware of the regulation.

Colleen Matt gave an overview of some of the preliminary data from the Washington State University researchers. She stressed that the data is preliminary, so no conclusions should be made at this point. She explained the research area and the method of dividing the cove into zones. The researchers recorded both the location and time periods used by boats, bears attempting to fish, bears catching live fish, and bears scavenging dead fish. So far, the students have collected data for twenty-six, 24-hour periods from June 18-August 1, 2002.

Joe Meehan reminded people to check their boat permits for this season. He told the group that permitting authority is going to stay with ADF&G. Mark Kuwada will be the contact person. He mentioned that ADF&G will have training packets for guides, and that people should let him know how many they need. Colleen passed around Mark Kuwada's contact information including his phone number, 267-2277.

Rex Bennett, a private user of the area, mentioned that he was concerned with the number of people who fish in the cove. He said it affects the quality of the area.

Discussion of public and agency comments and finalization of guidelines

The committee discussed the two written comments that were received as well as additional comments from committee members, meeting attendees, and staff. The merits of making the guidelines more detailed and specific were debated. The committee agreed that guidelines should be kept simple (see Attachment A for revised guidelines).

The idea of a buffer zone for bears was revisited. Some people thought that a buffer zone would provide a people-free area in which bears could fish and photographers could take unobstructed pictures of bears. The majority of the committee believed that a buffer zone would not be practical because it was not enforceable (i.e., the committee does not have the authority to restrict people from fishing in certain areas). The buffer zone might also result in a backlog of boats because anglers would take longer to reach their limits and move out of the prime areas and noted that bear viewers should rotate out as well.

The idea of a bear-viewing platform was mentioned. Jeff suggested that a subcommittee review the idea and report back to the WCMC in the fall.

Discussion of Monitoring Strategies

Colleen asked the group to discuss their roles in implementing and monitoring cove use. Jeff reminded the group that ADF&G's role is to enforce statutes and regulations, and the success of the WCMC process depends on everyone working together to make sure the guidelines are followed. He assured the group that ADF&G will be on-site at least for the short-term. He said it will be possible to put a reference to the guidelines in sport fishing regulations, but it will not happen before this season.

The group developed a step-down protocol for individuals to use when guidelines are not being followed:

1. Go to the source (i.e., talk to the person who is not following a guideline). [If the situation seems dangerous, go to ADF&G first .] If that doesn't work...
2. and a business is involved, call the owner with as much information as possible (e.g., name, details about what happened, who else was there). If a company is not involved or that doesn't work,...
3. Go to ADF&G with as much information as you can as soon as you can. If ADF&G is not on-site for some reason, call Joe Meehan (267-2281).

Lisa added that it is assumed that the WCMC will lead by example by following guidelines and encouraging their peers to do the same.

The role of the public and ADF&G was discussed. It was agreed that the role of the public is to:

1. Educate others about the guidelines
2. Provide guidelines to guides and other users if ADF&G is not there
3. Monitor compliance with guidelines
4. Communicate with each other
5. Rotate out of key areas to let others in
6. Lead by example

The role of ADF&G is:

1. To provide laminated guidelines to all users
2. To meet with new users and guides
3. To create a video orientation
4. Develop a placard to orient guests
5. Enforce laws and regulations
6. Be a resource for the public when other options have failed
7. Educate visitors about guidelines
8. Monitor guideline compliance
9. Implement guideline compliance
10. Monitor RBCHA resources
11. Collect visitor use data
12. Create season reports/compile seasonal visitor use data (Monitor and record success of guideline)

Evaluation criteria

Colleen reviewed some ideas for how ADF&G and the public can measure the success of the WCMC process (Attachment B). Although ADF&G does not have the resources to pursue all of the ideas, some of the criteria will be used this season. This information will be provided to the WCMC next Fall.

Parking lot issues

The group discussed the possibility of allowing snagging in the Wolverine Creek cove so that anglers could get in and out quickly. Dave Rutz noted that if the group wanted to pursue this idea, it would have to be through the Board of Fisheries process.

The issue of planes taking off in the cove was addressed. Alan Helfer said that sometimes it is necessary to take off in the channel between the cove and Big River Lake for safety reasons. Someone else pointed out that taking off in the constricted channel where there is boat traffic is a safety issue. Others pointed out that it disturbs bears and visitors. The WCMC agreed that the following language should be included in the guidelines: **“Aircraft users are encouraged not to step taxi, take off, or land in the channel between the cove and Big River Lake”**

In addition, the group discussed prohibiting people from parking boats or aircraft within 30 ft. of the creek outlet shoreline but did not reach consensus on that issue

Another idea that was discussed was the use of a buoy with guidelines placed in the cove

Parking lot issues that that will be addressed at a later date include, the research tower, boat storage, scientific side of monitoring, and following bears (distance between bears and boats).

Action items

- ADF&G should laminate guidelines and keep on-site
- ADF&G should provide new guidelines to all users
- ADF&G should create a video tape orientation for guides and other users regarding bears and the guidelines
- The Sport Fish regulations should reference the guidelines
- Information about how to approach other users should be included in the guide training packet
- ADF&G should meet with guides prior to the season
- ADF&G will provide guide and air charter services with the “Annual Report for Guides, Lodges, and Transporters” (a spreadsheet for recording the number of clients brought to RBCHA and the number of fish harvested in RBCHA) prior to the season.

Next steps

The next meeting of the WCMC will be in November 2003.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Attachment A

Guidelines for Visitor Use¹ Wolverine Creek/Big River Lakes Redoubt Bay Critical Habitat Area

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the Wolverine Creek Management Committee is requesting that all visitors to Wolverine Creek and Big River Lake within the Redoubt Bay Critical Habitat Area abide by the following guidelines and associated regulations. These guidelines are established to assure the continued use of the site for sport fishing and wildlife viewing; to provide for visitor safety; and to allow bears to naturally use the site for feeding and other activities.

- 1) **Feeding Bears** – The following actions are prohibited: **intentionally** feeding bears and other wildlife; allowing bears to obtain improperly stored food, fish and garbage; and negligently leaving food, fish or garbage in a manner that attracts bears.
- 2) **Harassment** – Alaska Statute 16.05.920 states that it is illegal to “take” wildlife. The definition of “take” includes pursuing, “*or in any manner disturbing*” fish or game.
Wolverine Creek Guideline: No actions shall be taken to drive a bear from the area or to attract a bear for any purpose (including photography, **fishing**, and viewing), nor shall actions be taken to alter a bear’s natural behavior. This does not apply to actions that are taken to defend a person or gear from imminent contact with a bear, as in the case where a bear reaches into a boat with its nose or paw. However, whenever possible conduct your activities at Wolverine Creek in a manner that does not place you in a situation where you need to defend yourself or your gear. Firearms should only be used for legitimate self-defense and legal hunting; they should not be discharged just to frighten bears from the area.
- 3) **Storing Your Food, Fish & Garbage²** – Store your food, fish and garbage in sealed, rigid containers (or sealed boat/airplane compartments) at all times, unless food is being consumed pursuant to Guideline #9. ADF&G and the Wolverine Creek Management Committee require the use of bear resistant containers when leaving your fish/food

¹ Shading indicates changes made by the WCMC at their May 7, 2003 meeting.

² • A bear-resistant food container is defined as follows:

- A securable container constructed of a solid nonpliable material capable of withstanding a minimum of 300 foot-pounds of energy.
- When secured and under stress, the container will not have any cracks, openings, or hinges that would allow a bear to gain entry by biting or pulling with its claws.
- Wood containers are not considered bear resistant unless they are reinforced with metal.
- Although some plastic containers are very sturdy or effective at reducing odors, they are generally not designed to withstand the stress and compacting forces an adult grizzly can apply to them.
- Ice chests and/or collars are not considered bear-resistant containers, however they are acceptable if never left unattended. **may be used for daily storage.**

unattended within one mile of the mouth of Wolverine Creek. Do not store fish on stringers, in plastic bags, in the bottom of your boat or on the lakeshore. If you visit Wolverine Creek without a container for your fish, plan to catch-and-release only.

- 4) **“Bear Buffer”** – Don’t let a bear get a hooked fish. Failure to adhere to this guideline may be construed as “*negligently leaving human food, pet food, or garbage in a manner that attracts these animals.*” Methods for following this guideline include the following:
 - Do not cast toward **within 30 feet of** a bear ~~within 30 feet~~.
 - Cease all fishing when a bear approaches within 30 feet, or at the point when your struggling fish attracts it, whichever is **greater**. If there are no bears within 30 feet on the opposite side of your boat, you may continue fishing on the side opposite the bear.
 - When a bear approaches within 30 feet, or at the point when your struggling fish attracts it (whichever is **greater**), diffuse the situation by releasing tension on your line or cutting your line, whichever is appropriate.
 - If anglers are in a boat and fishing, you may move to deeper water so that the 30-foot separation is maintained between the angler and the bear.
- 5) **No Bank Fishing** -- Fish from your boat if you have one. If you do not have a boat, fish from your plane. While not recommended, if you fish while wading in the shallow lake waters, fish in an area that will allow you to monitor bear activity ~~and do not leave any gear unattended on the lakeshore.~~
- 6) **Shoreline Closure** – To separate bears and people, do not enter the lake shoreline above the lake waterline in the cove. Additionally, do not enter the area along the entire length of Wolverine Creek **or leave any gear unattended on the lakeshore.**
- 7) **Fish Cleaning** – Cleaning fish on shore is not recommended. All fish remains should be deposited in deep water. Do not clean fish or place fish remains in the waters or on the shoreline within one mile of the outlet of Wolverine Creek.
- 8) **Litter** – Remove all garbage, food scraps, and food remains from the Critical Habitat Area and do not place them in the waters of Wolverine Creek, Big River Lake or the surrounding area.
- 9) **Camping/Picnicking** – Do not camp or build a fire within ½ mile of the outlet of Wolverine Creek. Do not prepare, cook or barbeque food within ½ mile of the outlet of Wolverine Creek. Consumption of food without cooking is allowed.

In addition, the following three guidelines are necessary to protect water quality and other resources at Wolverine Creek and Big River Lake:

- 10) **Island Closure** – Do not land boats, planes or people on the islands located within a ½ mile radius of the Wolverine Creek outlet. These islands provide waterfowl nesting habitats and became severely impacted as a result of past human use.
- 11) **Latrine** – Human waste shall be disposed of in an environmentally accepted method, at least ½ mile from the outlet of Wolverine Creek and at least 100 feet from the ordinary high water mark of any lake or stream and buried at least 6-8 inches deep; or in the facilities provided.
- 12) **Aircraft users are encouraged not to step taxi, take off, or land in the channel between the cove and Big River Lake.**