

Meeting Summary

Anchorage Bear Committee

October 3, 2002
ADF&G Aerie Conference Room
9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Meeting Participants

Kellie Pierce, Aaron Poe, Herman Griese, Mark Sledge, Thede Tobish, Karen Keesecker, Jeff Hughes, Jessy Coltrane, Rick Sinnott, Colleen Matt, Cindi Loker, Dan Bosch, Karen Deatherage, John Schoen, and Derek Stonorov. Doug O'Hara and Bill Sherwonit also attended.

Meeting purpose

To update members on action items; to discuss education strategies with Audubon; and to continue discussing ideas for implementation of recommendations.

Welcome and opening business

The meeting summary for September 5 was adopted with no changes. Cindi introduced John Schoen and Derek Stonorov of Alaska Audubon. Karen Keesecker with the MOA planning department introduced herself.

Update on action items

- Rick mentioned that the proposed fine increase (from \$50 to \$100) for negligently feeding bears and other specified wildlife must be approved by the Alaska Supreme Court, which probably won't happen this fall before bears begin denning. Therefore, the new fine should not be advertised until next spring.
- Rick will coordinate aversive training with DNR Parks next spring.
- The tipper cart will be tested at the zoo soon. *[Note: The tipper cart was tested by two black bears (Mabel and Zayk) in mid-October. Both bears had been fed from the open tipper cart several times, then not fed for a day. Both bears started with the tipper cart, but Mabel soon gave up. Zayk continued to push, roll, and pry at the tipper cart. He was able to shake some food out of a gap in the lid. After approximately 30 minutes Zayk accidentally pressed the locking device and the lid popped open. Doug Daniels will look for a better locking device. Most black bears would try to find an easier source of garbage or be frightened away before 30 minutes, so the tipper cart was a qualified success for bear resistance. The 55-gallon drum (made by Mark Richardson, AI Industrial Machine & Welding) with a metal, locking lid fared much better in the test. Neither bear was able to get into the drum, although a few kibbles fell out of a gap in the lid. The metal drum is appropriate for storage, but does not meet the requirements for curbside pick-up service.]*
- ADF&G has hired Lilly Goodman, education specialist for Region II. She will help standardize the bear safety message.
- Jessy presented a graph comparing bear-call data for 2001 and 2002. Jeff will use this information to brief the city administration on the activities of the ABC.
- Jeff said that he and John McCleary are tentatively scheduled to brief the Mayor and his staff regarding ABC activities. The Assembly will be briefed the following week.

- Colleen reported that the 311 number is likely to be available by next spring and the emergency services coordinator is willing to work with the ABC and ADF&G to deal with bear calls.
- Colleen handed out copies of the bear “hot spots” brochure. The final version will be printed in March 2003 for public distribution.
- Karen Deatherage told the group that the door hangers have been distributed. Overall, the feedback has been positive. Volunteers did hear some concerns about 6:30 a.m. trash pick-up, making it more convenient to take garbage out the night before. Mark distributed door hangers on Elmendorf. Posters have been given to 37 schools. Karen invited the group to a Living with Carnivores presentation by Doug Zimmer on October 30. *[Note: Rick, Jessy, Kellie Pierce, John McCleary and Barry Stratton (Sport Fish Division) attended.]*
- Colleen noted that there will be a meeting on October 30 to discuss draft bear viewing guidelines. The guidelines foreshadow an agreement between ADF&G and National Park Services about the best practices for bear viewing in the west side of Cook Inlet.

Ideas for implementation of priority issues/problems

The group continued discussion of priority issues. The following issues were discussed at this meeting:

Issue: Bear habitat is becoming more and more fragmented and travel corridors are diminishing

Jeff mentioned how critical habitat was defined in the Living with Wildlife in Anchorage Plan. The stakeholders defined critical habitat in terms of its functional quality (i.e., feeding, denning, and loafing areas as well as travel corridors). Thede cautioned members not to use terms like “critical” that might be confused with legal definitions, unless the areas really are critical to maintaining bear populations. Jeff mentioned that the Kenai Peninsula Brown Bear Conservation Strategy also wrestled with this issue, and he suggested referring to that plan for terms and definitions. *[Note: The Kenai Peninsula Brown Bear Conservation Strategy defines “important brown bear habitat” as “that habitat necessary to sustain a population at an optimal level so that brown bears do not approach threatened status.” It is further defined as “major feeding areas, including anadromous salmon streams to the upper limits of known spawning areas, and significant habitat linkages.” Significant habitat linkages are defined as those areas “that allow unimpeded movement of brown bears between major areas of the Kenai Peninsula and/or between areas of important brown bear habitat and that are necessary for preventing the creation of small, isolated brown bear subpopulations.”]*

Rick said he would base his recommendation for important or critical areas on salmon spawning streams, other riparian greenbelts used as movement corridors, and natural areas where bears are frequently observed or that have been heavily used by radio-collared bears. These are primarily feeding areas and movement corridors. Denning areas are not well known in the Anchorage area; however, most denning areas are likely protected over the long term by Chugach State Park and at least for the short term by Fort Richardson, Elmendorf AFB, and Bicentennial Park.

Thede stressed the importance of specificity in determining important bear habitat areas. He said that the more specific the group can be, the more helpful it will be to municipal planners. He outlined three avenues into municipal planning:

1. Design and maintenance (identify management prescriptions to be added to land use codes)
2. General land use planning (send final urban bear planning document to Planning and Zoning Commission)
3. Specific land use plans (include ABC representative in upcoming revision to the municipal parks plan and future revisions to the Anchorage Bowl, Eagle River/Chugiak, and Turnagain Arm plans)

The group decided that it would be most efficient to form a subgroup to develop a map of important bear habitat, including movement corridors, and suggest management prescriptions for these areas. The group can provide a base map for the group to use. The subgroup will define concepts such as fragmented habitat, movement corridor, important bear habitat. The group discussed the utility of variations of the map (e.g., for real estate agents). The information provided by the map may be important at the covenant level.

The group recommended that a formal document from the ABC requesting that MOA land planners incorporate identified important bear habitat into municipal planning decisions would be most effective. He said additional effort from the ABC and the public (e.g., attending Planning and Zoning Commission meetings) would be needed. ADF&G will be part of the technical advisory group for the upcoming revision to the MOA parks plan.

Kellie said the military is increasing their training efforts on Fort Rich. They are in the process of determining possible impacts, including increased mechanized activity, to bears.

Issues Identify (and protect) critical bear habitat and reserves (concentration areas)

[continuation of discussion from 8/1/02 meeting]

Evaluation

- Number of acres of important bear habitat lost
- Number of acres of important bear habitat protected by park or other designation
- Map of important bear habitat
- Index of bear use in most important areas
- Bear population estimates

Issue: What are the best methods to design trails and facilities in bear habitat?

The group agreed that science and experience should be used to dictate land use designations and to determine management prescriptions for trails. In addition, the group believed that it would be best for the subgroup to complete their work prior to the ABC developing minimum standards for trails. Because each case is different, the group suggested that Rick work with Jerry on the specifics for each trail.

Issue: People are ignorant about proper garbage disposal

John Schoen and Derek Stonorov, Alaska Audubon, described their program on bear education, focusing on their work with Kenai Peninsula residents. There were two main recommendations in the Kenai brown bear plan: education and garbage control.

Audubon placed a lot of emphasis on education. They concentrated on elementary schools most heavily. Derek developed a bear curriculum with lesson plans, some of which used videos and a bear kit. The bear kit included strips of bear hide, skulls, and track imprints. Two of the kits are at ARLIS and may be checked out by Anchorage area teachers. Derek also developed a Trails of Discovery teacher handbook that links lesson plans and hands-on materials.

Derek offered training sessions to teachers interested in using the lesson plans. Derek recommended giving copies of the bear curriculum (without supporting materials) to all teachers so they can become familiar with it before they check out kits.

Audubon established an outreach grant for communities to purchase bear-proof lids for dumpsters. They provided several small electric fences for dumpsters or other uses. They selected Cooper Landing to demonstrate formation of a bear-safe community. Derek developed a slide show on bear behavior and the importance of garbage management. It is available on CD-ROM. Lessons learned from the demonstration project were 1) implementing new ideas may take a long time and much persistence, and 2) peer pressure is more effective than agency pressure.

Audubon is willing to pay for developing a website linked to the ADF&G website that would provide details on where to purchase electric fences and garbage containers, how much they cost, and information on how to set them up.

Issue: People do not have access to inexpensive bear-resistant garbage containers.

Causes

- Public not motivated due to ignorance or stubbornness
- Containers not widely available
- Individual containers are expensive
- Standard for bear resistance not well known (needs work)
- Public land managers are not using them (e.g., in city parks) and are not setting a good example

Audience

1. Municipality and other land managers, especially in parks
2. Waste Management Inc. and other garbage pick-up services
3. Homeowners and renters
3. Apartment and condominium managers
4. Businesses, particularly food service industry

Not ranked

Community councils

Message

- Bear-resistant containers and electric fences exist (what works)
- May be fined \$100 for negligently allowing bears to eat garbage
- Managers potentially liable for attracting bears if someone is injured
- Bear biology (why are bears attracted to garbage) and bear conservation
- Human safety
- People want bears in the city, but not problem bears
- Include other carnivores in the message

Tools

1. Test (and endorse, if appropriate) tipper cart and other bear-resistant containers
1. Website that illustrates bear-resistant containers and electric fences with detailed information
2. Provide bear-resistant containers in city parks
3. Living With Wildlife plan (good example)
4. Media

5. Ask WMI to include “bear in garbage” notice on green warning tags
6. Presentations at community councils to promote and encourage use of bear-resistant containers and other bear safety messages
7. Outreach education project (primarily by ADF&G, may include a traveling display)
8. Demonstration or model neighborhood project (WMI or agency might subsidize tipper carts or other containers—Stuckagain Heights mentioned as a discreet neighborhood with substantial bear problems—may select a similar neighborhood with no additional bear management for comparison)

Not ranked

Urban Bear Week by mayoral proclamation

Peer pressure (e.g., bumper stickers)

Contest to design an inexpensive, bear-resistant container

Actions

- Develop website
- Write letter to municipality regarding funding for bear-resistant containers
- Invite media to container test
- Presentations at community councils
- Implement the “bear in garbage” warning on WMI green tags by next spring

Evaluation

- Summary statistics for the entire city or specific neighborhoods based on WMI green tags
- Number of hits on website
- Number of nuisance calls (Living With Wildlife goal)
- Number of tipper rentals or container sales
- Media articles
- Number (or proportion) of bear-resistant containers in parks

Action Items

- Develop website (Derek, Jessy, and Karen Deatherage). ADF&G is in the process of hiring a webmaster. *[Note: Should be on-board by the end of November.]*
- Write letter to municipality regarding funding for bear-resistant containers (Jeff, John McCleary)
- Invite media to container test (Rick, Doug Daniels). *[Done]*
- Presentations at community councils (various ABC members). Doug Daniels is planning on making presentations on the tipper carts this winter. Good time to piggyback. Karen Deatherage will contact neighborhood representatives. *[Note: Rick Sinnott made a presentation at the Girdwood Board of Supervisors’ meeting on October 21.]*
- Implement the “bear in garbage” warning on WMI green tags by next spring (Doug, Rick, Jessy)
- Develop a draft map of important bear habitats and provided definitions of terms (Rick, Jessy, Jerry Lewanski [or someone else from DNR Parks], Thede, Kellie, Herman, and Dan)

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on November 26 at the Fish and Game office from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Adjourn (9:00-2:00)