

MEETING SUMMARY
Anchorage Bear Committee

November 28, 2006
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Anchorage Office

Meeting Participants: Doug Ballou, Brad Muir, Bruce Seppi, *BLM*; David Battle, Chris Garner, *Fort Richardson*; Herman Greise, *Elmendorf*; Tom Harrison, *Chugach State Park*; Dennis Allen, *APD*; John McCleary (Parks), Robert Hall (Solid Waste Services), David Wigglesworth (Economic and Community Development), *MOA*; Dan Bosch (Sport Fish), Staci Griffin, John Hechtel, Grant Hildebrand, Larry Lewis, Elizabeth Manning, Rick Sinnott, Marian Snively (Wildlife), *ADF&G*

Facilitator: Teri Arnold

Meeting Purpose: To provide updates from agencies on bear-related issues; present Elmendorf/Ft. Richardson research project; present Wildlife Conservation Community Project (WCCP); and to discuss action items resulting from issues.

Welcome and Introductions: The meeting started at 8:45, which allowed the group to catch up with each other and to get settled in with coffee and snacks. Rick welcomed everyone and introductions were made around the room. Teri went over the agenda and passed around the sign-in/contact sheet.

Updates-Agency reports on bear-related issues:

Ft. Rich-Chris said that 12% of the large dumpsters at Ft. Richardson are now bear resistant. Approximately 100 still need retrofit lids. They are working with contractors on replacing old dumpsters with new bear-resistant ones. Stickers are used on the dumpsters informing people to shut the lids correctly. In order to identify problem bears two were shot with special paintballs. The results were inconclusive; either the paint came off or the marked bears left the area. One bear was captured and sent to Fairbanks for a hibernation study. Another bear was sighted on the golf course but it did not become a problem.

Elmendorf-Herman described above average calls for nuisance bears, primarily black bears. This increase in activity was likely due to the new housing construction along the Ship Creek corridor. One adult male bear was shot. At the end of October, two bears were still being seen at a dumpster. The Six-Mile Creek salmon run was below average, making the dumpster more of an attractant. The goal is to convert all of the base dumpsters into bear-resistant dumpsters: presently half are bear resistant. A bear educational and safety program is required and approximately 2,100 new personnel (many accompanied by family members) attended last year.

MOA-Robert attended the ABC meeting to listen and learn more about bears and garbage-related issues. SWS customers are less likely to attract bears because they are downtown; however, he will help the ABC wherever possible. SWS encourages people not to set garbage out the day before collection. He thought that last year's switch in collection days to avoid picking up garbage on Saturdays in bear problem areas may have been terminated too soon. Rick agreed that bears were still in Anchorage on September 1 and that the switch back to Saturday collection and early collection would be more appropriate in October, from a bear management perspective. Rick said that people are realizing the consequences for putting garbage out early and that the informational flyer included in SWS and Alaska Waste Transfer bills may have helped. Robert said the flyer could be included with bills again in 2007.

Dave W. said the municipality's salmon website now includes information about living in harmony with bears. He has \$7,500 dollars to fund a demonstration project on bear garbage containers (described later in this report). To help educate the public on bear issues Dave suggests using code enforcement officers, issuing fix-it tickets, and interpretive signs on the Campbell Creek Trail. The signs will depict habitat, bear, and salmon issues.

REI is partnering with the Muni's Parks Department, the Salmon in the City Program, and the Park Foundation to sponsor the "Celebrating Anchorage's Parks, Natural Spaces, and Wildlife Lecture Series". Rick, Staci, and Elizabeth will present information on living with bears in Anchorage and will include a bear safety component.

John M. described a normal year for bears in the parks. Bear warning signs were posted on the trails. Twenty-three bear-resistant containers were installed in city parks, nearly matching the 2005 total of 30 placed in 28 park locations. The Rasmussen Foundation helped to purchase the containers and a total of 53 are now available in parks. Other parks will be monitored to see if containers are needed.

BLM-Bruce reported that an adult cow moose was killed by a brown bear on a social (e.g., not maintained) trail in early June. The carcass was moved and the trail was temporarily closed. In July a large brown bear charged a person twice and the Rondy trail was temporarily closed. Bruce found bone fragments and some blood where a moose calf was killed which may have been associated with the charging incident. The View Point trail had fish carcasses scattered on it and some people avoided the trail. A black bear with cubs charged a woman with a baby in a stroller while crossing the fork of Campbell creek. Before seeing Sean's bear movement data, BLM built the Salmon Loop trail. Campbell Creek flooding washed out the trail this summer, and Bruce was wondering whether they could use Sean's data to help to reroute the loop. He is revising BLM's bear policy and adding the new information.

Brad mentioned that the KBBC had bear attractant commercials. Staci and Teri said that the KBBC spent \$2,000 and received over \$7,500 worth of product. Teri mentioned that the KBBC and the ABC should coordinate, especially when concerning Bird Creek. At a previous meeting, the ABC had recommended airing the “Living in Bear Country” video on the municipality’s public television channel. John H. learned that the distributor would charge a \$150 fee in order to release the video. The Safety in Bear Country group agreed to pay the fee. Staci will get a release form from the distributor to John H., who will finalize the process to get the video on the air.

ADF&G-Last summer several brown bears became a problem when anglers at Bird Creek allowed them to take salmon and food from packs. Dan passed around the Fishing in Bear Country sign that was developed and posted at Bird Creek. The message was targeted at anglers. The plastic-coated cardboard sign is durable and inexpensive (approximately \$5/sign). John M. suggested, and the committee agreed, that the ABC logo be included on the sign.

Rick said that it was an average year for bear-human interactions, although the Bird Creek situation was a new and potentially dangerous wrinkle. There were two sets of brown bear sows, both with a pair of two-year old cubs visiting Bird Creek. One of the bear groups was causing problems at the area campground and Bird Creek community. One of the two-year-old cubs flattened two tents in the campground, one empty and one with two adults and a child in it. No one was injured. It is rumored that the sow from this group was shot in Bird. The cubs disappeared about the same time and it is unknown whether they were shot or moved on. If the latter, they will be back and the situation could be worse next year. The newspaper and television coverage exacerbated the problem: when people read of the bears many came to Bird Creek to view them.

In total, eight black bears were shot in defense of life or property in 2006 and four additional black bears were captured and sent to the University of Alaska Fairbanks for hibernation research (these are considered DLPs because they are euthanized after the research). Two black bears were killed by vehicles and one was translocated. Only one brown bear was killed in the Anchorage area, in Kincaid Park by electrocution.

Rick and Jessy wrote 12-15 citations for negligently feeding garbage to bears and could have issued at least ten more, primarily to apartment managers. Their policy is to not cite apartment dwellers if the dumpster or other trash storage provided is not bear resistant. However, tracking down the names and locations of responsible apartment owners and managers is often time consuming.

Staci spoke about her “Volunteers in the Classrooms” program. She coordinated 26 presentations with the Anchorage School District that were delivered by volunteers. The themes of the presentations were bear natural history, safety, and attractants. Over six hundred students saw the presentations.

APD-Denny said police officers would like to write more citations for bringing out trash early, but APD is understaffed and busy with other obligations. At least two or three citations were issued last year, and he confiscated a pickup full of garbage where a black bear was often seen feeding.

Chugach State Park-Tom said two black bears were killed by park rangers: one at the Eagle River campground dumpster and one at the Eagle River Nature Center's dumpster. The McHugh Creek and Middle Fork Loop trails were temporarily closed because of potentially dangerous brown bear situations, and the Albert Loop Trail near the Eagle River Nature Center was closed in late summer, as usual, due to brown bear activity along a spawning stream. A bear swatted a sleeping woman at the Eklutna campground; however, her injury was minor. Tent camping was temporarily prohibited at the Bird Creek campground after the two tents were reported flattened by a brown bear. The Nature Conservancy coordinated with ADF&G and Chugach State Parks to send some of their interns to Bird Creek to educate the public on how to behave in bear country, and to observe bear-human interactions, without intervening.

Elmendorf/Ft. Richardson Brown Bear Research Project

Sean gave a presentation on his research on brown bears on and near the military installations. After his presentation, Sean addressed Bruce's inquiry about using this data to help to reroute trails away from high bear use areas. Sean said that the Elmendorf/Ft. Richardson Brown Bear Research Project was focused on the military installations, and it would not be appropriate to apply the information too broadly in adjacent areas, like Campbell Tract. The group will need to come up with funding to conduct bear research that addresses their specific questions in their specific locations.

The group would like to explore funding sources to continue Sean's research focusing on their issues. They can work with Sean to determine information needs for ABC work. Sean estimates that they would need \$100,000-\$150,000 to capture and fit the bears with GPS collars, plus \$35,000/year for each additional year of monitoring.

Wildlife Conservation Community Project on the Kenai Peninsula (WCCP)

Larry Lewis, from ADF&G in Soldotna, gave a slide show on a pilot project that he has developed on the Kenai Peninsula. In 2006 there were 29 DLPs and four maulings. The WCCP stresses the intrinsic value of wildlife and asks people to take responsibility for wildlife in the state. He says that community involvement is an important component in keeping bears out of garbage. Forty-eight out of 60 people in a neighborhood in Soldotna became involved in this study. Members of the neighborhood used bear-resistant garbage containers. The project ran for two years and there was not a single bear nuisance call during this time, in contrast to frequent problems before the containers were used. Larry spent considerable effort to monitor the neighborhood and make sure the containers were

being used correctly. The surrounding neighborhood became interested in the study after seeing the results.

Dave W. has \$7,500 funds available that he would like to use to demonstrate the effectiveness of bear-resistant containers in Anchorage. He wants to come up with a project similar to the WCCP, and is asking the group if this might be a good use of the funds. He would like to have input on identifying a discrete neighborhood in Anchorage, with bear problems, for the pilot project.

Report on Military Bear Response MOA and possible role for ABC

Herman asked about the status of the bear management memorandum of agreement that has been developed by Fort Richardson, Elmendorf AFB, the USDA's Wildlife Services, and ADF&G. Rick said that the ADF&G headquarters staff are reviewing the MOA and a signature is expected soon.

Action Items resulting from Agency reports on issues

The group discussed action item ideas and came up with the following:

- include the ABC logo on the Bird Creek warning signs
- decide whether to educate or cite people who are negligently feeding brown bears at Bird Creek
- implement an intern program at Bird Creek
- establish a means for more regular communication among the members of the ABC
- increase educational efforts
- discuss the trail closure protocol
- update/refresh moose-bear safety information, if needed
- create a website of issues addressed by ABC and include a library of literature
- partner with other agencies' educational staff
- create an interagency TV commercial
- review garbage collection schedule for next spring and put flyers in with bills
- prepare bear educational messages for the spring
- design the neighborhood garbage demonstration project
- find a way to use code enforcement officers
- give fix-it tickets, which would allow people with citations to avoid the fine if they purchased a bear-resistant container

Rick will organize a meeting for the Action Item subcommittee. The members of this subcommittee include Rick, Staci, Herman, David W., John M., Chris, Bruce, Dan, and Doug.

Next meeting date

April 3, 2007

Let Rick know if you are not available on this date.

Evaluation of group

The group is happy with the half-day meeting. They would like to keep the start time fifteen minutes before the meeting officially starts.

Adjourn

12:00

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