

MEETING SUMMARY
Anchorage Bear Committee

Thursday April 11, 2002
Rabbit Creek Rifle Range

Meeting participants

Al Meiners, Alaska Department of Natural Resources; Kellie Peirce, Fort Richardson; Mark Sledge, Elmendorf Air Force Base; John McCleary and Thede Tobish, Municipality of Anchorage; Aaron Poe, USDA Forest Service, Dan Bosch, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (Sport Fish), Jeff Hughes, Rick Sinnott, Jessy Coltrane, Colleen Matt, and Cindi Loker, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (Wildlife). Doug O’Harra, Anchorage Daily News, and Bill Sherwonit also attended.

In addition Bruce Seppi, Bureau of Land Management, and Captain Audie Holloway, Anchorage Police Department, have agreed to be members of the ABC; however, they were not able to attend this meeting.

Meeting purpose

To discuss implementation of stakeholder recommendations; continue to identify issues and problems; prioritize issues to be addressed by ABC; discuss how to address issues; and clarify ABC’s role at the Alaska Bear Forum.

Welcome and introductions

Colleen welcomed everyone and discussed the meeting purpose and agenda. The group introduced themselves. The written summary of the March 14 meeting was approved with no changes. Colleen showed members the bumper stickers produced for distribution at the Great Alaska Sportsmen’s Show, the Alaska Bear Forum, and other, upcoming venues, and she invited members to pick them up at Fish and Game.

Jeff passed around copies of a draft charter. The charter specifies the ABC’s role in implementing issues and solutions raised by the Living With Wildlife plan, plus any other issues or solutions the ABC considers important, and sets a timeline. After 18 months the group will review progress to date and determine if and when additional work is needed. Members should review the draft charter and suggest revisions. The charter will be discussed and adopted at the next meeting.

Implementation status for stakeholder recommendations

Rick reviewed Fish and Game’s bear conflict response policy and bear-related priority actions from the Living with Wildlife plan. The priority actions included recommendations for an urban wildlife position or program with Fish and Game or the Municipality, bear conflict response training (for APD, Troopers, and other responsible officials), bear attractant ordinance and/or education programs, bear encounter safety programs, and trailhead bear warning programs. Al said State Parks has stopped posting trailheads with specific bear sightings;

however, they do post generic bear safety advice and close trails when warranted. BLM still posts bear sightings. John McCleary said Kincaid Park staff has kept a log of bear sightings in past summers, but he agreed with AI that that may be counterproductive and will ask Kincaid staff not to keep a log this summer. Jeff pointed out several other priority actions from the Living With Wildlife plan that could apply to urban bears, such as wildlife habitat assessment, critical habitat reserves, recreational trail design guidelines, wildlife feeding education program, Anchorage wildlife festival, and expand wildlife education in schools.

Each agency representative discussed their agency's progress towards implementing the Living With Wildlife recommendations.

- Municipal Parks and Recreation (John McCleary). Posted trail warning signs in Kincaid Park (will change this policy). Monitors and enforces proper food storage and garbage disposal at city campgrounds.
- Chugach State Park (Al Meiners). Removed most garbage cans in park; few remaining dumpsters have metal lids. Monitors and enforces food storage in campgrounds; issues citations to offenders. Posts generic bear safety information (e.g., "You are entering bear country") in campgrounds and at trailheads. Removes moose carcasses near trails or, if difficult to remove, closes trail until carcass is eaten. Closes loop trail near Eagle River Nature Center for several months each summer when salmon are spawning, to avoid bear encounters. Rangers conduct aversive conditioning at campgrounds. Trails are brushed to provide greater sight distances. Parks interpretive staff have designed and distributed several different bear safety posters.
- Elmendorf AFB (Mark Sledge). The wildlife staff conducts wildlife safety lectures which Air Force personnel assigned to Elmendorf are required to attend. Spouses and children of active duty personnel are not required to attend, but some do. Wildlife staff also conducts tours of the wildlife museum. They have trained school staff on base in bear safety, and the schools practice "bear drills" that are like reverse fire drills (i.e., at 3 short whistle blasts, everyone files into the school in an orderly fashion). The base has modified dumpsters with metal lids and increased the frequency of garbage collection at some dumpsters. Wildlife staff has already placed "Keep Alaska's Bears Wild: Handle Your Garbage Responsibly" bumper stickers on base dumpsters. Base newspaper runs stories on when bears are out of hibernation, bear safety tips, etc.
- Municipal Planning (Thede Tobish). Endorsed Living with Wildlife plan. Beginning a major revision of the city parks plan; protecting wildlife habitat will be a component. The city will work with ADF&G and the ABC to incorporate bear reserves and movement corridors in the parks plan.
- ADF&G Sport Fish (Dan Bosch). Conducts stream surveys to count salmon. Stocks salmon in local streams. Distributes brochures on fishing etiquette (e.g., don't leave fish entrails on the bank to attract bears, toss them in the stream). Have developed a good working relationship with Anchorage schools and a model program for fish education that might be useful for bear education.
- Forest Service (Aaron Poe). Posts generic bear information signs at campgrounds and trailheads. Campground dumpsters are bear-resistant. Trained Begich-Boggs interpretive

naturalists on bear safety messages. Rangers conduct some aversive conditioning of bears in campgrounds. Rangers cite people for unsecured campground food. Have developed a bear hazard analysis, which is an internal agency guide for planners to use in designing facilities to avoid or minimize bear problems.

- Fort Richardson (Kellie Peirce). Designed and distributes a bear safety pamphlet for Otter Lake picnickers and campers and plans to do the same at Moose Run Golf Course this summer. Trains 200 seasonal staff in bear safety. Gives a bear safety briefing to range users. Purchased 25 bear-proof garbage containers for Otter Lake and plans to purchase 25 more for the Moose Run golf course. Also plans to put metal lids on dumpsters.

Additional issues/problems regarding Anchorage bears

The Living with Wildlife plan identifies habitat protection as a major concern. The suggested adding two issues: which important bear concentration areas and travel corridors should be maintained? These issues were added to the list in Attachment A.

Prioritization of bear issues/problems to be addressed by ABC

Members used the Chicago vote method to prioritize the list of issues and problems. Members were given 7 dots and could assign 1 or more dots to the highest priority issues or problems, based on likelihood of success, cost, importance to public, importance to bears, urgency, and ability to address quickly. The highest priority issues were:

1. People feed birds in summer and allow bears to get seeds (8 dots)
2. Identify (and protect) critical bear habitat and reserves (concentration areas) (7 dots)
3. People don't have access to inexpensive bear-proof garbage containers (7 dots)
4. ADF&G should offer a training session to APD and troopers (and other responders) regarding bear behavior and response options (6 dots)
5. People are ignorant about proper garbage disposal (6 dots)
6. Some garbage pickup days and hours are not bear friendly (6 dots)
7. There should be a single phone number for people to call to report bear sightings and problems (5 dots)
8. A lot of incorrect myths about bears are still circulating in the general population (2 dots)
9. Bear safety messages are inconsistent (5 dots)
10. People leave pet and livestock food out so that bears become food-conditioned (2 dots)
11. Children need better bear safety and bear ecology education (2 dots)
12. What are the best methods to design trails and facilities in bear habitat? (2 dots)
13. What are some opportunities/structural solutions to minimize human-bear conflicts? (1 dot; related to #12)

14. Bear habitat is becoming more and more fragmented and travel corridors are diminishing (1 dot)
15. Schools do not act appropriately to bear problems (1 dot; related to #4)
16. How (or should) we manage bear populations in Anchorage? (1 dot)
17. Enforcement regarding attractive nuisances is inconsistent (1 dot)

After the exercise, Colleen found an issue from the list that had not been considered: Garbage is unsecured (e.g., poor dumpster management and design) in residential areas and parks. Garbage issues ranked high in priority; therefore, the group will consider and rank this issue at the next meeting.

Implementation of priority issues/problems

All of the highest priority issues will be discussed to identify 1) causes of the problem, 2) messages, 3) target audiences, 4) tools, 5) recommendations, and 6) measures of success. The group selected two issues to discuss in the time remaining (Appendix B). Discussion on the second issue was not completed.

Alaska Bear Forum

Colleen invited all members to participate in the Alaska Bear Forum on April 13. John Schoen, with National Audubon Society, will moderate a panel discussion, introducing members of the ABC and inviting questions and comments from the audience.

Note: The following ABC members attended the Alaska Bear Forum and participated in the panel discussion: Jim Posey, Kellie Peirce, Jerry Lewanski, Dan Bosch, and Rick Sinnott. Jeff Hughes and Cindi Loker were in the audience. The audience asked questions and raised several interesting ideas. More visual information could be presented in locations where lots of people gather, such as malls, a traveling exhibit for schools and facilities such as Kincaid chalet, and outdoor venues such as the spring gathering of elementary students at Bicentennial Park. Encourage people to talk to their neighbors about garbage when they see it put on the curb the night before pickup or otherwise left unsecured. Doug Van Etten, an Anchorage assembly member, has talked to several school board members about outdoor safety (e.g., with guns, bears, moose, avalanches) in schools; may be an opportunity to have a 2-week session in PE classes.

Action Items

Before the next ABC meeting, Colleen and Cindi will incorporate Living With Wildlife recommendations into the list of issues that the ABC has identified. The recommendations will be considered in context with other solutions considered by the ABC.

Members urged Doug O'Harra to write an article for the Anchorage Daily News on some of the issues discussed during the meeting (*note: an article appeared on April 13*). Rick will call Jeff Lowenfels and ask if he can write a column asking people to pull their bird feeders for the summer (*note: Jeff called Rick first and will mention issue in upcoming column*).

Jeff will talk to Audubon folks to coordinate message about not feeding birds in summer to avoid attracting bears (*note: Jeff talked to John Schoen, and both Schoen and George Matz, president of the Anchorage Audubon, were quoted in Doug O'Harra's article*).

Rick will ask his headquarter's webmaster to add a note about not feeding birds in summer to the Fish and Game website.

Note: This has been done; see the following web site--

<http://www.state.ak.us/local/akpages/FISH.GAME/wildlife/geninfo/birds/forbirds.htm>

WINTER BIRD FEEDING IN ALASKA

If you live in an area visited by black bears, please do not feed birds from April to late October, when bears are out of hibernation. Bears quickly learn to eat bird seed, and this attraction to human dwellings has increased the number of bears shot in defense of life or property.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on May 9 at a place to be determined.

Adjourn (8:00-11:30)

Attachment A

Categorized Issues That ABC Will Address

2.1.1 Issue: garbage

- Garbage is unsecured (e.g., poor dumpster management, poor dumpster design) in residential areas and parks.
- People don't have access to inexpensive bear-proof garbage containers.
- People are ignorant about proper garbage disposal.
- Overnight backcountry users leave food and garbage available to bears.
- Garbage management messages are inconsistent.
- Some garbage pickup days and hours are not bear friendly (e.g., no pickups on Saturday or before 8 a.m. in bear-use areas).

2.1.2 Issue: other attractive nuisances

- People feed birds in summer and allow bears to get seeds.
- People leave pet and livestock food out so that bears become food-conditioned.
- Inconsistent messages to the public about handling moose and bear carcasses.
- People leave fish wastes on stream banks and in garbage cans forming an attraction.

2.1.3 Issue: enforcement and public safety

- Enforcement regarding attractive nuisances is inconsistent
- Response by police, troopers, and ADF&G to bears in neighborhoods needs to be more consistent.
- ADF&G should offer a training session to APD and troopers regarding bear behavior and response options.
- There should be a single phone number for people to call to report bear sightings and problems.

2.1.4 Issue: bear safety

- Children need better bear safety and bear ecology education.
- Trail users in bear habitat, especially people moving at a high rate of speed and are unsafe in bear country.
- Schools do not act appropriately to bear problems.
- Bear safety messages are inconsistent.

2.1.5 Issue: public attitudes about bears

- A lot of incorrect myths about bears are still circulating in the general population

2.1.6 Issue: habitat

- What is best for bears/humans? Low-density housing or habitat corridors?
- Bear habitat is becoming more and more fragmented and travel corridors are diminishing.
- What are the impacts of fire on bears and their habitat?
- What are the best methods to design trail and facilities in bear habitat?
- What are some opportunities/structural solutions to minimize human-bear conflicts?
- How (or should) we manage bear populations in Anchorage?
- Which important bear concentration areas should be maintained?
- Which important travel corridors for bears should be maintained?

Attachment A

Evaluation of Highest Priority Issues (to be continued)

People feed birds in summer and allow bears to get seeds.

Causes of the problem

- People want to see birds
- People don't know birds don't need to be fed in summer and/or that bird feeding attracts bears
- Some people intentionally feed bears at bird feeders
- Birdseed spilled on the ground accumulates over winter
- Bird feeders are accessible to bears

Target audience

- Birdseed vendors
- People who feed birds in the summer in areas visited by bears
- People who belong to bird organizations (e.g., Audubon, Bird TLC)
- People who want bears in their neighborhood

Tools (ranked by likelihood of success, cost, importance to public, importance to bears, urgency, and ability to address quickly)

1. Newspaper articles (e.g., Lowenfels' garden column)
2. Poster and flyers at birdseed vendors
3. Bird organization newsletters and web sites
4. Message on bird hotline (maintained by Anchorage Audubon)
5. Fish and Game web site
6. Community council newsletters
7. Door hangers (e.g., scout community service project)
8. Radio PSAs
9. Flyers in utility bills
10. TV message (possible images: bird feeder with dead bear) (long term)

Recommendations

- Call bird feeders “bear feeders”
- Personal contact by enforcement officers (issue warning on first contact, citation on second)
- Message: “Your actions will lead to death of bears.”
- Approach bird seed vendors
- Bear-proof bird feeders
- Some neighborhoods don’t have to worry about bears (yet)
- Inform bird feeders what kinds of food and when to feed (?????)
- Message: “If you feed birds between April ___ and October ___ in _____ neighborhoods you are creating a bear problem.”
- Clean up bird seed accumulation in April

Evaluations (measures of success)

- Annual number of calls regarding bears on decks, porches, and yards (ADF&G and Elmendorf keep partial records; however, a dispatcher assigned to bear calls could keep more comprehensive records for the entire city)
- Annual number of shootings in defense of life or property (DLPs) declines
- Annual number of relocated bears declines
- Annual number of bear hazings declines (only Elmendorf routinely hazes bears at present)
- Annual tonnage of bird seed sold from April to October declines
- Pre/post phone survey in targeted areas

ADF&G should offer a training session to APD and troopers (and other responders) regarding bear behavior and response options.

Causes of the problem

Target audience (ranked in order of priority)

1. APD
2. Troopers
3. City parks and recreation staff
4. Park volunteers and hosts
5. ADF&G, DNR, BLM, APLIC information staff

6. Sport Fish Division staff
 7. School staff
 8. Airport police
- USFS personnel (not ranked; already trained?)
 - General public (remove from list of responders and deal with under Public Information/Education?)
 - Military (already well-trained)
 - Park rangers (already well-trained)

Tools (ranked by likelihood of success, cost, importance to public, importance to bears, urgency, and ability to address quickly)

Recommendations

- Message: “Understanding bear behavior will help you respond professionally and appropriately on bear calls.” 1) What is a dangerous bear? 2) Who and when to refer calls. 3) How to avoid creating a worse public safety hazard.

Evaluations (measures of success)