

MEETING SUMMARY
Anchorage Bear Committee

Thursday June 13, 2002
Russian Jack Springs Chalet
8:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Meeting participants

Doug Daniels, Anchorage Refuse/Waste Management Incorporated (WMI); Al Meiners, Alaska Department of Natural Resources; John McCleary, Municipality of Anchorage; Captain Audie Holloway; Cliff Fox, 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). Joel Gay, Anchorage Daily News, and Bill Sherwonit also attended.

Meeting purpose

To meet with Waste Management Incorporated (WMI) and to continue discussing issues and ideas for implementation.

Welcome and introductions

Colleen welcomed everyone and discussed the meeting purpose and agenda. The group introduced themselves. The written summary of the May 9 meeting was approved with no changes. Colleen showed two recent, bear-related articles from the Anchorage Daily News (“Famed raider of birdseed, garbage turns up near Skilak Lake” and “Juneau cracking down on bear-drawing trash”).

Updates on action items

Rick and Jessy completed a draft of the bear “hot spots” map, and Colleen drafted the text for a brochure. The color map delineates areas in the Anchorage Bowl and Eagle River communities where Fish and Game has documented numerous calls by residents and park visitors. The map and text will be combined in a brochure for enforcement officers and concerned citizens to use to educate and inform the public about bear/human conflicts. Al has mapped bear problem areas in Chugach State Park. This will be combined with the “hot spots” map of the Anchorage Bowl in the final version.

John Schoen, National Audubon representative, is interested in looking for funding sources for bear information and education projects.

Rick has not completed the training course for APD officers, state troopers, and other first responders to bear calls.

Dan will show the “Staying Safe in Bear Country” video to his stream survey crew in July. (*Note: This has been done.*)

John found that a television ad would cost \$2,000-\$10,000 to produce, depending on length and content. Radio ads can be inexpensive to produce, but cost \$800/month to air (I'm unclear about the number of times it would be repeated each month at that rate). Karen Lew has produced several 30-second PSAs for ADF&G on various subjects; four pertain to bears, garbage, or bird feeders. They were sent to radio stations in southcentral Alaska in May or June, but we haven't heard if any have aired yet.

Doug has advertised in the Alaska Star (Eagle River newspaper) and would be willing to insert bear safety tips in his ads.

Al looked into using bill inserts after the McHugh Creek mauling. He concluded they were too expensive. Doug believes people usually ignore them. Door hangers are problematic because some people fear they are a sign to burglars that nobody is home.

Our bumper stickers are being placed on dumpsters on the Kenai Peninsula by the Sexy Senior Dumpster Divers.

Al said the Parks interpretive section (Bob Dittrick) might be able to design a poster under CIP project funds, then copies could be ordered by agencies. Posters may be appropriate for schools, trailheads, city parks, and dumpsters. Doug has heard positive feedback about the bumper stickers and thought that a poster could be effective. Al also suggested creating an attractive drawing or photo of a bear that could become a familiar "hook" or logo. The logo could refer to a website that could provide additional information, similar to juneaubears.com. A logo with a short message or website address could also take the form of a rubber stamp for envelopes (e.g., Waste Management bills).

New Bear Feeding Regulation

Last January the Alaska Board of Game revised the bear-feeding regulation, making it illegal to feed bears through negligence. The regulation is effective as of July 1. It differs from the previous regulation by adding "coyotes" to the list of species and "pet food" to the list of attractants. It also replaced "intentionally leave human food..." with "negligently leave human food..." This affects enforcement by addressing a significant problem with bears (especially) getting into pet food and by lowering the standard of proof. Presently a person can argue that they aren't "intentionally" leaving garbage out for bears (even if they repeatedly videotape the event); after July 1 we just have to show that the person is negligent.

Fish and Wildlife Protection intends to enforce the law by writing a warning for the first offense and a citation for a \$50 fine for subsequent acts of negligence. This was their policy under the previous version of the regulation. The group discussed the role of Fish and Game and APD in enforcing the revised regulation. Audie said APD officers could issue citations for misdemeanors under state law. He didn't think officers should make a special effort, but respond to complaints. The group felt that a special effort to find and cite offenders was probably not warranted or desirable at this early stage. They believed we should try other ideas, primarily information and education, first.

The Department of Fish and Game considered adding "bird seed" to the list of attractants. It is one of the major bear attractants in Anchorage, much more than pet food. However, we couldn't work out the problem of allowing bird feeding, which is usually a good thing, with

attracting bears and we didn't want the bird feeding issue to prevent enacting the other necessary revisions. We are also working hard, with the Anchorage Audubon Society and experts like Jeff Lowenfels, to inform people about the problem of feeding birds in summer without jumping immediately into another prohibition.

Waste Management Incorporated

Doug Daniels presented information on WMI, and the group discussed ways to work together. WMI picks up garbage in many communities with bear problems or potential bear problems (e.g., Kenai, Kodiak, Juneau, Ketchikan, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Nome). They have lots of experience in the lower 48 states. WMI is a stable company with low turnover in drivers and management. They have worked with the Girdwood Board of Supervisors to reduce bear problems, including designing and selling bear-resistant containers for trash receptacles. This expanded-metal cage is now sold directly by Mark Richardson (A-1 Industrial) for \$650. Doug estimated about 30 units have been sold in the last 4-5 years.

Doug says WMI wants to assist the ABC and be a resource. WMI is not the only service in Anchorage. Downtown pickup is handled by the municipal Solid Waste Services department, and there are several small companies that specialize in dumpsters or commercial/industrial waste management.

We discussed the recent shift to Saturday pickup on the lower Hillside and Eagle River. The reason for the recent schedule change was the growing number of households in south Anchorage and Eagle River. Doug said bears were not a primary concern in developing the schedule, but that in a few years, with more information and a well-documented need, they would consider adjusting the pickup schedule using bear complaints as one of the criteria. He said changing the schedule should be a last resort because customers generally believe change is not good.

Curbside pickup is not mandatory in Anchorage. There are garbage problems that WMI cannot address. Drivers and handlers work four 10-hour days/week. Trucks head out at 6 a.m. and start picking up about 6:15 to 6:30 a.m. Dumpster pickup starts at 4 a.m.

Customers can lease or buy metal lids for dumpsters. A metal lid costs \$8 to \$30/month. They are only provided if a customer requests one. WMI manufactures them.

We discussed design and cost of bear-resistant containers. Doug said OSHA requires them to keep containers under 70 pounds (each crew visits about 800 customers/day). Doug prefers a 32-gallon size; larger containers can be too heavy. Fifty-five gallon steel drums are too heavy. He doesn't like the idea of slipping a plastic container inside a steel drum because handlers must reach in (risking cuts and other injuries) and then lift out (extra physical effort). He also doesn't like plastic bags in steel drums for the same reason and because reaching in to grab a bag risks cuts and punctures from broken glass, needles, etc. Cages must have a front opening, 6-inch legs (to minimize strains from bending), and a standard latch so handlers don't have a wide variety to deal with. Doug said he'd investigate appropriate residential containers used in other states. He'd be willing to give customers plans for the container they designed. Someone mentioned the juneaubear.com website has plans for a container.

Drivers see lots of bear activity on routes. Handlers pick up trash spilled by bears. They can differentiate between bear, dog, and moose messes. Handlers attach blue tags to garbage containers for violations (e.g., receptacle too heavy). Doug said they would consider adding another line on the blue tag to warn people that bears had been in their trash. The information on blue tags is compiled in a spreadsheet. Doug thought that this information could be provided to agencies. The group had reservations about using this information in enforcement; however, we may be able to routinely obtain summary statistics from WMI that would highlight problems in a specific neighborhood. This information would be invaluable for monitoring the success of the ABC's information and education efforts. Once we obtain some baseline data, we could set a threshold to quantify an objective to reduce garbage problems.

The Anchorage office has six customer service representatives that might be able to call customers with an identified bear/garbage problem to add a personal touch, reinforce the message, and suggest ways to resolve problem.

WMI is willing to be a corporate sponsor and challenge others to do the same.

Other discussions

Jeff recommended that the ABC contact the Assembly so that they know the group exists. Some of the recommendations of the ABC may need to be implemented by the city, and we need to keep the Assembly apprised.

An important concern raised in several previous meetings is to identify and protect critical bear habitat and concentration areas. New trails and subdivisions are being built. The "hot spots" map does not show bear concentration areas of movement corridors; it merely delineates areas with existing bear/human interactions.

We need a single phone number for bear complaints and information and a website to provide more detail about bear behavior, bear attractants, regulations, bear-resistant containers, bear safety, living in harmony with bears, and other links. Audie said the city is prepared to establish a 311 nonemergency phone number that might work for bear calls. He thought it would be in effect before the next municipal election.

Action Items

Committee members should review and comment on the bear "hot spots" map and accompanying text by June 21.

Jessy will find plans for a bear-resistant container on juneaubears.com or other source.
(Note: *This has been done.*)

Cindi will ask John Schoen if he can attend the next meeting.

Jeff will check with Jim Posey and attempt to schedule a briefing at an Assembly work session before July 1 to make them aware of the ABC and our joint efforts.

Rick will send members a copy of the revised bear-feeding regulation.

We need to get a list of all waste transfer companies serving the Greater Anchorage area and communicate our needs and intentions to them as well as

to WMI.

5 AAC 92.230. FEEDING OF GAME. A person may not intentionally feed a moose (except under terms of a permit issued by the department), bear, wolf, coyote, fox, or wolverine, or negligently leave human food, pet food, or garbage in a manner that attracts these animals. However, this prohibition does not apply to use of bait for trapping fur bearers or hunting black bears under 5 AAC 84 - 5 AAC 92.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on August 1 at the Fish and Game office (corner of Raspberry and C Street) in the Aerie conference room from 8:30 to 11:30.

Adjourn