



Ontario's Bear Wise Program 2004: *Reporting progress, results and success*

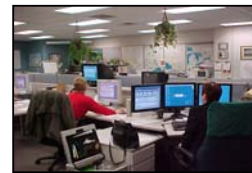
Background:

- On December 17, 2003, Natural Resources Minister David Ramsay announced that MNR would take the lead role in coordinating the management of problem bears in the Province of Ontario.
- The government was acting on key recommendations made by the Nuisance Bear Review Committee in its November 2003 report.
- Of note, the Nuisance Bear Review Committee did not find any connection between the cancellation of the spring bear hunt in 1999 and the perceived increase in nuisance bear activity.
- On March 30, 2004, the Minister officially launched the Bear Wise Program.
- The Bear Wise Program supports key government priorities including: Healthier Ontarians; Safe, Strong Communities and Government that Works.
- Ontario invested an estimated \$5 million in the multi-pronged Bear Wise Program in 2004.
- Bear Wise cornerstones: **Prevention, Awareness & Education, Response and Reporting**
- Long term strategy is to reduce human-bear conflicts by focusing on **Prevention and Awareness & Education**

Bear Wise Program cornerstones



Prevention



Reporting



Awareness & Education



Response

= Results

Year one of Ontario's Bear Wise Program – Highlighting 2004 Successes

- Bear Reporting Centre and 24 hours a day, seven days a week **toll free phone line** established and staffed with trained people. More than 14,000 calls were received into the computerized system which also offers automated information about bears. In addition, a computerized occurrence and response information system was developed.
- The Ministry of Natural Resources, OPP and Sault Ste Marie Police Services developed a protocol **clarifying roles and responsibilities** around responding to problems between humans and bears. Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police has supported the protocol to its membership. District Offices were supported and equipped to deliver the Bear Wise program.
- A community funding program supporting hazard assessment, prevention and awareness & education was implemented
- Delivery partnerships were developed in a number of communities and service providers were contracted where appropriate
- A successful **communications program** was implemented across Bear Country and was based on provincial bear awareness and safety goals and with a primary objective to make individuals and communities aware of the toll free telephone line and preventative actions they can take to reduce human-bear conflicts.

"We all have a role to play in reducing human-bear conflicts. By increasing awareness on how to avoid unintentionally feeding bears, we will drastically reduce nuisance bear activity which will improve the quality of life of everyone living in bear country," David Ramsay March 30, 2004.



Prevention

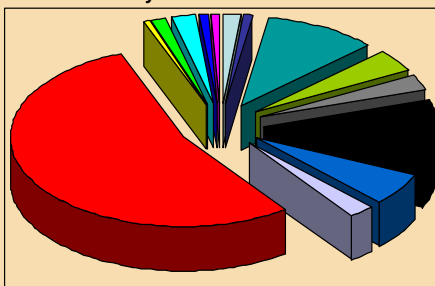
Achieving Results:

Healthier Ontario - Provided information and tools to help the public and communities prevent human-bear conflicts.

Government that works – Involved everyone, from municipal government, police, and individuals in in our joint efforts to reduce human-bear conflicts.

More Active Citizens Contributing to a Stronger Democracy - Working with stakeholders and community members to develop community-based programs to prevent human-bear conflicts.

Summary of Bear Attractants - 2004



- Agriculture
- Bird Feeder
- Commercial Garbage
- Composter
- Dirty BBQ
- Food Smell
- Fruit Trees
- Garden
- Household Garbage
- Landfill
- Livestock Feed
- Pet Food
- Restaurant Grease Oil
- Beehives

Over 50 per cent of bear-human conflicts are the result of improperly stored garbage. The first step to prevention is education and awareness.

Summary of Activities:

Activity	Action
Municipal Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •About 460 communities are in Bear country, 399 of these were contacted by District Offices and about 138 actively participated in Bear Wise •June 14, 2004, MNR announced \$900,000 to support community-based bear prevention, awareness and public education programs to increase public safety in bear country. •MNR received and reviewed 200 projects. Funding requests totaled \$2.015M. •\$986k was allocated to fund more than 165 projects. (e.g. bear-proof containers, electric fencing, hazard assessments, etc) •Over 80 hazard assessments were completed in communities, most with the help or leadership of MNR •fact sheets, magnets, posters, etc (Municipal tool kit) distributed to communities via MNR field staff. •Variety of information available on Bear Wise web site. •Matt advertisements made available for community use.
Memorandums of Understanding - Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •About 40 service MOU's were signed or verbally agreed to with communities •The protocol with police services was endorsed by 31 of 42 municipal police agencies and the OPP.
Partnership Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •In 2004, MNR initiated 5 cooperative research projects with municipalities to monitor and assess the effectiveness of bear deterrents e.g. electric fencing •Study to look at techniques of deterring bears through non lethal means initiated in Sudbury with Cambrian College •Bear Wise Community champions so far include Ear Falls and Elliot Lake.



Reporting

Achieving Results:

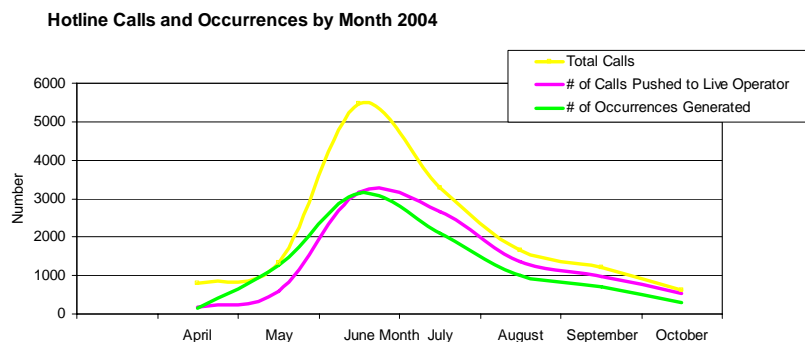
Safe and Vital Communities – On March 30, 2004 the Ontario government announced it had established a toll-free hotline as part of a new Bear Wise strategy to help manage problem black bears and to make communities safer.

People can call the toll free, 1-866-514-BEAR (2327) 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Healthier Ontario – The government of Ontario clarified roles and responsibilities around responding to problems between humans and bears. MNR provided the toll-free Bear hotline and encouraged the public to call the hotline to report bear problems. In the case of an immediate emergency the public was advised to call 911.

Ontarians have been living and coexisting with bears from our earliest days but our interaction is increasing as we move into more rural and unsettled areas and bears adapt to human presence. Public safety is paramount and learning to live with bears, recognizing the important place they have in our ecology and the things we humans need to do to minimize human-bear conflict is a key part.

Summary of Activities



Activity	Action
Toll-Free telephone line for public to report conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •MNR's Bear Wise hotline was operational on April 1, 2004, and was available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to the public wanting to call and report human-bear conflicts. The line is staffed from April 1 to November 30. In intervening months, the toll-free number is not staffed, but is maintained with a continuation of the automated prevention messages including one to contact local police in the case of an emergency. •A total of 14,550 calls were received (yellow line on graph).- 2004 would be considered a moderate to low year in terms of problem bear calls •9,495 calls (65%) were forwarded to a live operator (pink line on graph). •8,734 calls (60%) resulted in an occurrence reported (green line on graph). •In arranging for the provision of a toll-free number, MNR hired and trained nine staff. The line operated for 228 days in 2004. French language and hearing impaired services and technology were provided.
Public Awareness Campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Key to informing the public about the Bear Wise hotline was an aggressive public awareness campaign. (The hotline number was published on all materials and the web site was widely profiled.



Awareness & Education

Achieving Results:

Healthier Ontario – MNR expanded its education efforts and implemented a comprehensive public awareness program to reduce situations that attract bears.

The complex block contains several elements: a screenshot of the Ontario Natural Resources website showing search and navigation options; a poster titled 'What are the...' with a bear image; a poster titled 'Be Bear Wise: Admire them. Respect them. But please, don't feed them.'; a poster titled 'Bears in your schoolyard. What you can do.'; a poster titled 'What You Can Do' with a list of actions; a poster titled 'Don't Feed the Bears: Do not leave pet food outside' with contact information for reporting bear problems; and a poster with Cree text and a bear image.

Summary of Activities:

Activity	Action
Plan, Strategy, Branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed and delivered in 2004. Branding used on all Bear Wise materials. Be Bear Wise: Admire them. Respect them. But please, don't feed them.
Audiences & Messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Messages focused on key areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing/eliminating food sources not naturally eaten by black bears (garbage, pet food, bird seed). Reporting bear problems or emergencies. Understanding black bears. Everybody has a role to play. Message delivered in English, French, Cree and Ojibway and delivered within the distribution of black bear populations (specifically North of Highway 7). Audiences included farmers, campers, cottages, schools, children, communities, food business, the general public, press, Ministry employees, other government ministries and agencies). Message was delivered broadly by MNR main office, including media relations and also locally by field staff in municipalities.
Public Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advertisements placed in nearly 120 English newspapers, 15 French newspapers, in farm publications and outdoor magazines in May, June and July 2004. Developed and distributed 550 Municipal tool kits Developed and distributed 200 tool kits for MNR staff In 2004, arrangements were made to distribute fact sheets and school posters to 51 Ontario District School Boards (public and separate) and 26 school authorities in Bear Country, north of Highway 7. School Boards were asked to distribute information to the more than 2700 schools that exist north of Highway 7.
<p>In 2004 MNR produced and distributed approximately 18,000 posters, 800,000 fact sheets, 50,000 magnets, 100,000 wallet cards. List of products follows below:</p>	
Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7 fact sheets Web site Magnets Advertisements Tool kits News releases 2 kinds of posters Technical notes Displays Wallet cards Local initiatives Educational materials including electronic book, fact sheet, video and posters Stock articles

One of the leading black bear authorities, Dr. Steve Herrero from the University of Calgary praised Ontario as being a leader on the leading edge of comprehensively addressing the human bear conflict issue in North America.

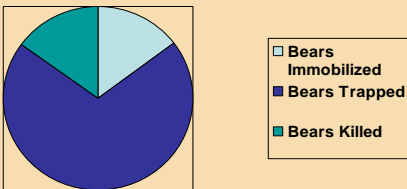


Response

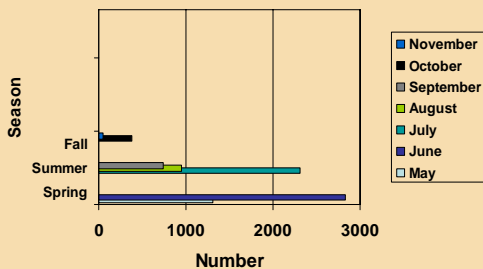
Achieving Results:

Safe and Vital Communities - Public can call 911 or the local police and they respond when personal safety is threatened by a bear. MNR responds to non-emergency problem bear calls.

Total Bears Trapped, Immobilized, Killed for 2004



Total Bear Occurrences 2004



Ministry led, but community based, the problem bear response plan is centered on the full participation of municipal government, communities, individuals and police.

Summary of Activities:

Activity	Action
2004 Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •8,734 occurrences reported through PCC to districts •339 bears trapped & relocated; 73 bears tranquilized & relocated; 221 bears recorded as destroyed (number of actual bears killed in defence of property is thought to be much higher but unreported)
Training and Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Common training protocols developed for MNR staff, service providers, and agents •Standardized handling protocols developed (immobilization, trap, transfer, dispatch) •Developed problem bear decision tree for consistent occurrence response (also provided to police services). •More than 50 season Bear Technicians hired (equivalent of 25.5 full-time equivalents). •8 staff training courses offered (3 immobilization, 5 problem bear handling)
Memorandums of Understanding - Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •About 40 service MOU's were signed or verbally agreed to with communities for municipal service provides and agents handling bears on behalf of MNR. •The protocol with police services was endorsed by 31 of 42 municipal police agencies and the OPP.
Tracking System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Bear Incident and Response Tracking Application (BIRTA) developed. •MNR now able to track bear occurrences, number trapped, immobilized or killed, summarize bear attractants, etc •MNR also able to run a variety of reports •Online system (launched in 2005).



Results and the future...

Achieving Results:

In one short year, Ontario has come a long way in dealing with human-bear conflicts.

An entire program, based on the four cornerstones – prevention, awareness and education and reporting and response – was launched and implemented under very tight timelines.

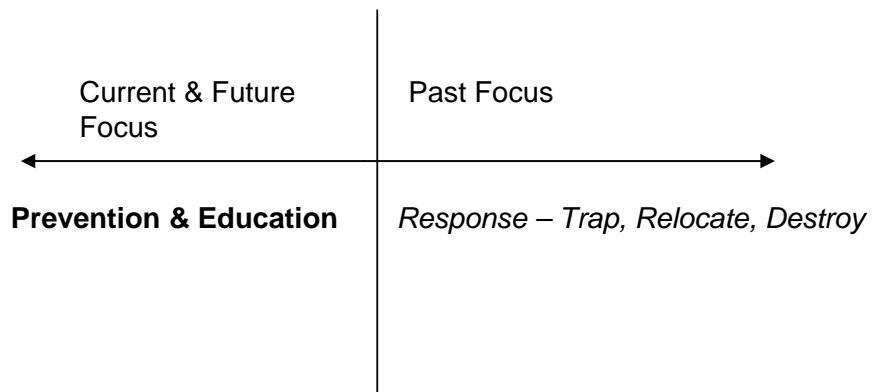
We are making a difference. We now have a coordinated approach to the management of human-bear conflicts in Ontario.

Building on the strong foundation laid in 2004, MNR's focus within the Bear Wise Program in 2005 will continue to be awareness & education and prevention.

As to whether we have reduced the number of human-bear conflicts in 2004, it is too early to tell. It will likely take 2-3 years to really see the difference. Awareness has increased. The public knows who to call. The people responding to the calls know what to do. Those charged with handling bears, have the training to respond. Communities have taken advantage of the support funding.

We also have the tools we need to help people be bear aware.

Other tools, such as the Bear Incident Reporting Tracking System, enables MNR to gather data and generate information. MNR can collect base line information it can use to compare in coming years. MNR is now also able to generate online reports and see in real time what areas are experiencing high incidents of reporting.



Everyone has a role to play in reducing human-bear conflicts. The success of this MNR led, but community-based problem bear response plan is dependent on the full participation of municipal government, communities, individuals and police.

Increased prevention and education will help to reduce the number of calls MNR receives to respond to problem bear incidents.

Understanding the black bear's life cycle, and by learning about their natural food sources is also important in not only reducing human-bear conflicts, but also in learning how to cohabitate with them. After all, Ontario's residents share the out-of-doors with black bears. Communities, recreational properties and parks are in places that once were the sole domain of black bears and other wildlife. And, as nature would have it, bears are actively out and about during the very same seasons as people, making it more likely for people and bears to run into each other.