

Be a "Bear Smart" Community

"Bear Smart" Criteria Inside



The Problem.

During bear season, Conservation Officers (COs) in British Columbia respond to thousands of calls and complaints about bears. Most of these problems begin when people allow bears to access non-natural food sources. Unfortunately, because there are few alternative control methods once bears have learned to access human food, Conservation Officers often have no choice but to kill "problem" bears.

Each year in British Columbia approximately 950 black bears and 50 grizzly bears are destroyed as a result of conflicts between people and bears.



Sources of Bear "Problems"

Access to Human Food

If bears are allowed to access human food and garbage, they quickly learn to associate it with people and become what is called food-conditioned. These bears lose their fear of humans and become habituated to people.

As people continue to encroach on bear habitat the potential for this conflict only increases.

Food-conditioned bears learn to expect human food and are more likely to approach people than wild bears. These bears can damage your property and they are a potential risk to you and the safety of your family. In most cases, however, when a bear comes into conflict with people, it's the bear that loses.

Human Development

Both bears and humans like to settle in valley bottoms and along streams. More development is occurring in these areas, meaning that bears will be living in closer proximity to people. Bears that live near human settlements can become "problem" bears if they are allowed to access non-natural foods.

"Problem" Bear Costs

Problem bears cost British Columbia taxpayers big money. The British Columbia Conservation Officer Service spends more than \$1 million every year responding to bear complaints and relocating or destroying bears. Property damage, which is not included in this figure, is estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. Bears damage household items, fruit trees, apiaries, livestock and vehicles.

Once bears learn to access human food, management options, besides destruction of the bear, are limited.



Bears in dump at Whistler 1993.

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Management Options

The "Bear Smart" Community program is a proactive conservation strategy that encourages efforts by communities, businesses and individuals to reduce bear/human conflicts. The goal of the program is to focus efforts on addressing the root causes of bear/human conflicts, reduce the number of conflicts and, ultimately, reduce the number of bears that have to be destroyed due to conflicts.

This program will be based on a series of criteria that communities must achieve in order to be designated as "Bear Smart". It is a co-operative venture and entirely voluntary on the part of communities. The responsibility to manage bear/human conflicts rests with everyone and it will require participation from the provincial government, municipal governments, and local citizens to successfully implement this program.

Translocation

Translocation is one management option available. Bears are trapped, moved and released into the wild. Translocation, however, is rarely successful as often these bears return to their original home territory, or they become "problem" bears in other communities. In addition, translocated bears often fail to adapt to their new habitat - they likely starve to death or are killed by bears that already occupy the territory.

Aversive Conditioning

"Bear Smart" Communities will have more management options to deal with bear conflicts such as hazing or aversive conditioning. This involves using deterrents to teach the bear to associate humans or human food with a scary or negative experience. Bear deterrents include: rubber bullets, plastic slugs, anti-riot batons, foul-tasting chemicals, electric shock, acoustic devices and trained bear dogs.

Hazing and aversive conditioning are most effective when they are used to prevent bears from becoming conditioned to human food. They are not considered effective once bears have already learned to associate food and people. Within "Bear Smart" Communities, however, fewer bears will be coming into conflict and those that do will not be receiving a readily accessible food reward. Therefore, hazing and aversive conditioning of bears will only be considered as options in communities that are designated as "Bear Smart".

What is "Bear Smart"?

Criteria for Communities to Achieve "Bear Smart" Status

1. Prepare a bear hazard assessment of the community and surrounding area.
2. Prepare a bear/human conflict management plan that is designed to address the bear hazards and land-use conflicts identified in the previous step.
3. Revise planning and decision-making documents to be consistent with the bear/human conflict management plan.
4. Implement a continuing education program directed at all sectors of the community.
5. Develop and maintain a bear-proof municipal solid waste management system.
6. Implement "Bear Smart" bylaws prohibiting the provision of food to bears as a result of intent, neglect, or irresponsible management of attractants.

Criteria for Communities to be Designated "Bear Smart"

1. Prepare a bear hazard assessment of the community and surrounding area.

Identify high-use bear habitat by species (grizzly or black) in the community and surrounding area (travel corridors, natural food sources such as berry patches and salmon streams, breeding areas, denning areas, etc.)

Map non-natural attractants within the community and surrounding area that attract and/or are accessible to bears such as landfills, transfer stations, park and highway pull-out litter barrels, orchards, residential garbage collection routes, downtown dumpsters, etc.

Review and map patterns of historic bear/human conflicts based on complaint records to assist with the identification of bear hazards.

Map human-use areas that may conflict with bear habitat such as school yards and residential areas located adjacent to heavy bush, walking trails that pass through berry patches, etc.



Using all the above information, identify and map existing and potential bear hazards. The hazards should be mapped with a ranking scheme (e.g., high/moderate/low)



Bear/Human Conflict Management

2. Prepare a bear/human conflict management plan that is designed to address the bear hazards and land-use conflicts identified in the previous step.

Develop strategies to resolve bear hazards and potential bear/human conflict areas.

Identify preferred wildlife movement corridors around the community and any work required to restore natural corridors that may have been interrupted by human activity/development (e.g., this may require moving existing facilities to other, less intrusive areas).

Direct the removal of cover by brushing vegetation to reduce hazards (e.g., removing brush around portions of parks, school yards, golf courses and in areas adjacent to residences in high-risk attraction areas).

Develop a community landscape plan that avoids the use of fruit trees and other plants that may act as attractants and calls for the removal of existing fruit trees that are causing problems. Include specific strategies to address bear management associated with any landfill closures or electric fence installations.

Assess the costs of the various bear management strategies and make recommendations on a budget cycle to finance implementation of the plan.

Implement a process for overseeing the implementation of the bear/human conflict management plan (e.g., establish a bear/human conflicts committee).

3. Revise planning and decision-making documents to be consistent with the bear/human conflict management plan.

Include consideration of important bear habitat/use areas in all land-use decisions documents.

Avoid development in prime bear habitat so as to reduce/eliminate the potential for bear/human conflicts.

Revise the Official Community Plan to reflect the bear/human conflict management plan.

Implement restrictive covenants consistent with the revised OCP.

Revise land zoning consistent with the revised OCP.

Revise components of the Regional Solid Waste Management Plan pertaining to the community (in cooperation with the regional district) to be consistent with the bear/human conflict management plan.

Revise any other planning and decision-making documents that may have an impact on bear/human conflicts to be consistent with the bear/human conflict management plan.





Education is a Key Criteria

4. Implement a continuing education program (i.e. Bear Aware), directed at all sectors of the community focusing on:

Bear biology and behaviour

Residential, commercial, agricultural and industrial practices to manage non-natural attractants including: garbage storage, barbecues; human and pet foods; compost; birdfeeders; orchards, vineyards, apiaries, grain growing, vegetable growing, home-grown fruit; etc.

Proper behaviour in bear habitat and during a bear encounter in the community.

Establishing a level of tolerance towards the presence of and natural behaviour of bears in reasonable numbers in or near the community.

A program for communicating current bear activity to the public and responding to requests for advice in minimizing bear attractants.

Bear Aware is an initiative to reduce bear-human conflicts in residential areas through community-based education programs throughout British Columbia.

Guided by the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, with funding and support from various levels of Government and private organizations, the Bear Aware program promotes practices that improve public safety and respect for wild bears.

For more information or to establish a local program for your area call 250/828-2551. Or, visit the website: www.bearaware.bc.ca



Solid Waste Management

5. Develop and maintain a bear-proof municipal solid waste (MSW) management system.

Ensure that any and all municipally-owned and operated components of putrescible MSW collection, transfer, disposal, recycling and composting in areas that are accessible to, or are frequented by, bears are bear-proof.

Implement a by-law to ensure that the same is true of any and all private sector components of putrescible MSW collection, transfer, disposal, recycling and composting (see criteria #7).

Implement a compliance strategy for the municipal solid waste management bylaws to ensure compliance.



Examples of some "how to" approaches for bear-proofing MSW systems:

Collection shall include use of bear-proof litter barrels on downtown streets which bears may be attracted to and at all municipal park facilities (campsites, ball parks, soccer fields, etc.)

Commercial/industrial collection routes in bear areas shall use bear-proof dumpsters.

Disposal shall consist of one of the following: landfilling inside a properly designed, constructed and operated electric fence; incineration using a complete-combustion incinerator properly sized to the population; or a bear-proof transfer station that ships the refuse outside of the area to a bear-proof disposal facility.

Backyard composting may need to be restricted in residential areas adjacent to high-use bear habitat or otherwise required, by bylaw, to be conducted in a bear-proof manner (e.g., use of electric fencing in backyards, or use of bear-proof composting containers such as steel drums).

Community composting of putrescible matter in bear areas shall be conducted inside an electric fence.

Legislation

There is legislation in effect that can help prevent the creation of "problem" bears and provide public safety. Under the *Wildlife Act*, it is an offense for people in British Columbia to feed dangerous wildlife (bears, cougars, coyotes and wolves) or disobey orders to remove and clean up food, food waste or other substances that can attract dangerous wildlife to their premises.

Conservation Officers may issue a written dangerous wildlife protection order, which requires "the removal or containment of compost, food, food waste or domestic garbage." If people fail to comply with the order they could face a penalty of up to \$50,000 and/or six months in jail.

6. Implement "Bear Smart" bylaws prohibiting the provision of food to bears as a result of intent, neglect, or irresponsible management of attractants. Implement a compliance strategy for these bylaws to ensure that there is full compliance with them. Bylaws may:

Make it an offence to discard or store waste, food, or other attractants in non-bear proof containers, either intentionally or unintentionally,

Require that garbage be stored in a bear proof container and/or location and that curbside placement before the morning of pick-up not occur,

Include community composting requirements in high-risk attraction areas of the community.

Bylaws to Promote "Bear Smart" Actions

The primary goal of the "Bear Smart" program is to diminish the rate and intensity of human-bear conflicts, which will thereby increase public safety and reduce the number of bears that are killed. Using proactive management, communities can reduce conflicts between humans and bears by identifying and eliminating the root causes of the conflicts. The "Bear Smart" Community Program provides communities with options for addressing their own unique situation and helps them reach the objectives of the program.

The Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection will provide technical advice to communities that are seeking to obtain "Bear Smart" status. Several British Columbia communities have been proactive in reducing bear conflicts and have already met one or more of the criteria required to be "Bear Smart". A background report providing detailed information on each of the criteria and including examples of their successful application has been prepared and is available to communities that are interested in pursuing this initiative. The Report entitled the "Bear Smart" Community Program: Background Report can be found on the Internet at http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/wld/documents/bearsmart_bkgdr.pdf.

For further information on the "Bear Smart" Communities program please contact your local office of the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection.

