



Bear Management Plan



Valdez Bear Working Group
March, 2013

Mission

The Valdez Bear Working Group will develop a Bear Management Plan that strives to create and maintain a sustainable relationship between humans and bears.

Bear Management

The purpose of this plan is to set management guidelines for Bear issues within our community. Bear encounters have increased significantly over the last decade. Bear sightings are an everyday occurrence during the summer months. Public opinion on how to manage bears has evolved as well. In the past, bear sightings were considered a public safety response in which Law Enforcement reacted and responded - the bear was usually destroyed.

Today, the community values bears as an important part of the local ecosystem and as a valuable resource. Continued interaction between bears and human settlement is inevitable. Managing bear and human behavior in our community is a very complex task. Bear issues are multi-faceted. The City includes several rural residential subdivisions which have been developed adjacent to salmon streams. Dayville Road is an important visitor recreation area with abundant wildlife viewing opportunities. The downtown commercial area, school zones, and more urban residential areas also have bear issues, primarily bears foraging for garbage. Each segment of the community has to be addressed separately to effectively and safely manage bear and human interactions.

For the last several years the City of Valdez has employed a multi-dimensional, proactive response. This includes public education, Community Safety Officers, garbage control, hazing and trapping bears and other suitable solutions. The Police Department, Community Development, Public Works and the Parks & Recreation departments, along with several members of the community, the State Department of Fish & Game, Valdez Fisheries Development Association (VFDA), Alaska State Parks, and the State Department of Transportation have come together to form the "Valdez Bear Working Group." The committee has worked to develop the overarching framework to manage the human-bear interface within the City of Valdez.

Two primary areas of concern exist in Valdez. **A significant recurring problem is the tendency of black bears to become habituated to human-generated garbage.** Many areas of town sit astride traditional bear pathways or are adjacent to bear habitat. The clear indication is that once a bear becomes habituated to eating garbage it is almost impossible to rehabilitate to natural behavior. The normally shy bears become less afraid of human contact. **Difficulty in effectively managing inappropriate human behavior of visitors engaged in bear viewing along Dayville Road is of significant concern from mid July to early September.** Fish returning to spawn at the Valdez Fisheries Development Association hatchery adjacent to Dayville Road has created a plentiful food source for many land and marine mammals. Major improvements to the Dayville Road corridor during the middle of the last decade have enabled increased recreational use of the area and have made the area more accessible for wildlife as well. Dayville Road has become a world class bear and marine mammal viewing location. Human activity has made the area a hazard for bears, those viewing wildlife and motorists transiting back and forth to work along the corridor.

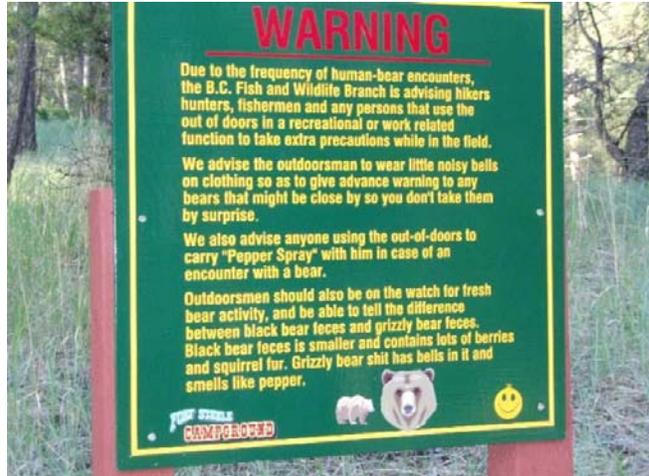
The Community of Valdez has a responsibility to implement a bear management plan to mitigate the ever-increasing possibility of a mauling or other bear/human interaction-caused injury. The tangible benefits of implementing an effective bear plan are:

- Increased safety for residents, visitors, and bears using urban habitat
- Promote tourism and economic diversity through wildlife viewing
- Reduced property damage by food-conditioned bears
- More effective and efficient use of public resource

To that end, the Bear Working Group recommends Valdez work over the next 3-5 years toward attaining the “Bear Smart” designation and implement policies, procedures and work plans to do so. Bear Smart is a framework that guides a community toward sustainable co-existence with humans and bears. Much of that is dependent on the responsible actions of humans. The Bear Smart Community Program is based on fulfilling a short list of criteria to be recognized as “Bear Smart.” The responsibility to manage human-bear conflicts rests with everyone and will require participation from state government, municipal government and local citizens to be successful.

The criteria include:

1. Complete a [bear hazard assessment](#).
2. Prepare a [human-bear 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 human-bear conflict management plan.
4. Implement an effective [education program](#) directed at all sectors of the community.
5. Develop and maintain an effective [bear-proof municipal solid waste](#) management system.
6. Implement and enforce “Bear Smart” [bylaws](#) prohibiting the provision of food to bears as a result of intent, neglect or irresponsible management of attractants.
- 7.



Most importantly, there must be a steering committee comprised of stakeholders representative of the community to champion the program. The Bear Working Group (BWG) has been in place for the past two years and has made significant progress on all Bear Smart criteria. The Valdez Bear Hazard Assessment is attached as Appendix A. This document should be considered the human-bear conflict management plan. The Bear Working Group is reviewing and considering changes to planning and decision-making documents. The education program is outlined in this plan. The municipal solid waste management system improvements are outlined in this plan.

The BWG includes the following City employees: Police Chief, Public Works Director, Parks & Recreation Director, Community & Economic Development Director and Animal Control Officer. Representatives from the State of Alaska include Alaska State Troopers, Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Alaska State Parks, and the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities. The BWG also includes a representative from Valdez Fisheries Development Association, Alyeska Pipeline Service Company – Terminal Security, a member of the Valdez City Council, and an at-large member of the public well educated in bear management.

TOP PRIORITIES—2013

1.) Develop a Community Vision That Supports “Bear Smart” Principles

The community vision recognizes the primary goals of this Bear Plan including: a) improve public safety; b) improving survival for Valdez bears in urban habitats by keeping them out of trouble; b) enabling

safer co-existence between humans and bears; c) reducing management kills; d) improving human behavior regarding non-natural attractants and bear viewing; e) reducing property damage; and f) significantly reducing the dependency of bears on garbage and other non-natural attractants; g) eliminating the food-conditioning of bears.

Public support of the Bear Management Plan is essential. It is important to develop a community vision that enables safer coexistence with bears, and fewer human-bear conflicts and management kills. Valdez residents and business owners already show a high level of support for implementing Bear Smart measures. The BWG needs to engage the public in determining the best options for bear-proofing, including provisions of bear-proof waste management in neighborhoods, reducing other residential attractants, and increasing public awareness about bears. While the community has already been doing this in various ways for years, there needs to be a concomitant—and widely accepted—set of policies issued by Valdez’s municipal government.

2.) Implement a Public Education Program

Design and implement an education program with a consistent Bear Smart message that targets visitors, new residents, seasonal workers as well as current youth and adult residents.

To help increase the safety of children and staff, all schools need to fully engage in Bear Smart practices. The BWG will design a program that can be brought into the schools during the spring season to educate students and staff about bear awareness.

The education program will both benefit and utilize the Parks & Recreation Programs such as Summer Fun, Hiking Programs, the Run Series, and other miscellaneous programs offered through the city. Bear Smart information will be distributed at all events and programs.

All messages and signs about bears need to be consistent. They need to contain sufficient information on how to avoid and respond safely to bear encounters.

The BWG will provide “Bear Smart” information on the City of Valdez website that is easy to find by placing a primary link to comprehensive information about bears and the need for Bear Smart practices in a prominent location on the City’s home page, including links to local contacts and organizations.



3.) Implement & Enforce Bear-Proof Solid Waste Management throughout Valdez

Design and install the most effective bear-proof waste management system possible, tailored to Valdez's unique circumstances. All waste whether garbage, recycling, or compost should be considered a bear attractant. The goal is to stop bears getting access to these wastes and becoming food-conditioned.



Focus first on making bear-proof waste management more easily available in neighborhoods for residents who have no means to transport their garbage.

In February, 2013 residential, curbside garbage collection was reduced from twice weekly to one pick-up per week. This eliminates human attractants one day a week in each residential subdivision.

Beginning spring 2013 the City Solid Waste Crew will alter collection schedules so residential curbside pick-up occurs earlier in the day, thus eliminating the time human attractants are available to bears and other scavengers.

The 2013 City of Valdez Budget included \$100,000 for the purpose of retrofitting up to 200 community dumpsters with bear-proof lids. This retrofit will take place during the spring and early summer of 2013.

Members of the Solid Waste Crew will document repeat offenders of poor residential waste management practices. The Animal Control Officer and Police Department will assist in enforcing proper Bear Smart trash etiquette.

4.) Bear/Human Management on Dayville Road

During times when bears are frequenting the VFDA hatchery area on Dayville road, the **Animal Control Officer (ACO), with the Community Safety Officer(CSO)** will be used to monitor people on Dayville road during the summer months, to include crowd control, traffic and parking management.



Traffic and parking management will include, but not be limited to, designation of no-stopping corridors in certain areas, speed bumps installed to avoid bear-auto collisions, appropriate informational signage, and designated parking areas.

The BWG will implement an education program for Dayville Road visitors. For 2013, the proactive approach will include distribution of Bear Smart brochures at the local RV Parks, campgrounds, hotels, tour offices, restaurants and retail establishments. Brochures and additional information will also be distributed at the Valdez Convention & Visitors Bureau Visitor Information Center, the US Forest Service Crooked Creek Information Center and at the Alaska Marine Highway office. On-site, in-person informational presentations are also planned for the RV parks and campgrounds during the busy summer months. This will provide information at the point of entry for most visitors; hopefully educating many prior to visiting Dayville Road. On-site at Dayville Road the ACO and CSO will disseminate brochures and provide “in-the-moment” advice commensurate with the situation.

New signage along the corridor will also be installed. All messages and signs about bears need to be consistent. They need to contain sufficient information on how to avoid and respond safely to bear encounters.

Future plans for the Dayville Road corridor may include development of safe bear viewing stations so that the people have safe areas to view the bears and the bears will be able to have access to their food source without feeling threatened or harassed by the public.

Consideration is being given by the BWG to the creation of a trained group of local citizen volunteers to assist the ACO and CSO with providing information and teaching appropriate bear viewing behavior to Dayville Road visitors. This will be explored more throughout the spring of 2013 with no known implementation date.

5.) Training

The 2013 Budget includes funding to bring “Bear Smart” experts and ADF&G officials to Valdez to conduct training for City of Valdez and other interested agency personnel. This training will take place in late April 2013. The exact scope of the training and education aspects is yet to be finalized but will include:

- Bear 101 Education
- Bear Encounter Mitigation
- Bear Encounter Protocols
- Problem Bear Solutions
- Crowd Control
- Community Priorities & Principles

6.) Sign Plan

Many components of the Bear Plan include signage. To ensure consistent messaging the Bear Working Group will be developing and adopting a Sign Plan. This will include signs for Dayville Road, trails, dumpsters, solid waste facilities, fishing areas, public recreation sites, and other strategic locations. Education materials developed for distribution will also be consistent with signage for message reinforcement.

Response Plan

The response plan provides law enforcement, the Animal Control Officer, the Community Service Officer, and AST and ADF&G a variety of techniques to discourage human to bear contact.

City Ordinance Enforcement. Law enforcement can discourage the feeding of bears by actively enforcing VMC06.08.040- A. except as provided in this section or under terms of a permit issued by the city of Valdez, the state of Alaska or the United States federal government, a person may not: 1. Negligently feed a moose, bear, coyote, wolverine, fox or birds of prey (including eagles, hawks, owls, falcons) or deleterious exotic wildlife, or negligently leave human food, animal food, or garbage in a manner that attracts these animals.; or 2. Intentionally feed a moose, bear, coyote, wolverine, fox or birds of prey or deleterious exotic wildlife, or intentionally leave human food, animal food, or garbage in a manner that attracts these animals. B. These prohibitions do not apply to the use of bait for trapping furbearers or deleterious exotic wildlife.

Use Non-Lethal techniques. Techniques such as bear hazing, can be used when bears come into the community and exhibit undesirable behaviors. Non-lethal control of bears may be used when it is determined that a bear's behavior does not pose a moderate to high risk threat to public safety or cause significant damage to public or private property.

Orphaned cubs may be transported to a State-approved facility, a list of which is maintained by ADF&G. The City will work proactively with the State to place cubs in an approved facility.



Use of Lethal Techniques. The City of Valdez has entered into a Cooperative Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Agreement with ADF&G outlining the standards for the use of lethal techniques. The SOP provides guidelines in conformance with the State laws governing bears killed in defense of life and property (DLP). In the situation that a bear has posed a moderate to high risk threat to public safety or caused significant damage to public and/or private property, and non-lethal techniques have proven ineffective, it may be determined, through the use of the SOP, by the Chief of Police or his designee that a bear must be humanely dispatched. A copy of the SOP is attached to the document as Appendix B. The City is also required to obtain an annual permit from ADF&G authorizing the Valdez Police Department to conduct DLP's. That permit has been obtained for 2013 and is attached to the Plan as Appendix C.

In order to employ these techniques the City of Valdez has one bear trap. A second bear trap is being constructed by the Public Works Department staff and will be available for field use during the summer of 2013.

Conclusion

The widespread use of bear habitats by people resulting in the loss of natural habitats for use by bears, and the increased availability of food sources such as garbage and landscaping are the primary reasons for increased human-bear conflicts. Because **access to garbage is by far the major non-natural attractant in our community,** in residential subdivisions and the core downtown area, it is incumbent on

people to stop allowing bears access to garbage. This should be one of the primary focuses of our activities.

Appropriate pro-active education and on-site mentoring of visitors to Dayville Road should be another primary focus. This could significantly reduce the likelihood of a disastrous bear-human activity where the life of one or both participants is in jeopardy.

Valdez seeks to create a sustainable relationship between bears and humans by:

- Properly educating the local public and visitors;
- Properly training City and agency staff to address bear management issues;
- Reducing access to garbage by bears through implementation of bear proof waste management practices;
- Enforcing VMC 06.08.040 on the public level;
- Promoting safe bear viewing practices and creating safe bear viewing areas for visitors;
- Appropriately employing non-lethal and lethal techniques to problem bears to protect people and property