

Seward Wildlife Community Conservation Program (WCCP) Spring 2011 Recommendations to the City of Seward

Introduction: The Seward WCCP is a citizen's group whose fundamental goal is the conservation of wildlife and their habitats in the Seward area. The group was formed in 2008 with the guidance of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Since its formation, the WCCP has garnered the support and participation of multiple local organizations and agencies primarily working to reduce negative bear-human encounters in the Seward area. In 2008, the WCCP applied for and received substantial financial grant funds from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and ConocoPhillips to allow the sale of 650 Bear Resistant Garbage Cans (BRGC) for a quarter of the full cost to residents of the Seward area. The BRGC were very well received and were reported to be very effective by those who had the opportunity to purchase them. Our recent and significant efforts to gain additional funding for this purpose have been unsuccessful. However, the Seward WCCP has identified several steps that the City of Seward could take to encourage local residents to handle their trash and other bear attractants responsibly and recommends the following:

1st Recommendation: Include Bid Items to provide Bear Resistant Garbage Cans (BRGC) and Bear Resistant Dumpster Lids (BRDL) as part of the RFP for the new 10 year trash handling contract scheduled to be in place by January of 2013. Or ask Alaska Waste to initiate a voluntary BRGC lease program in the Seward area as soon as possible.

Realizing that citizens generally do not favor government mandates, the Seward WCCP has accepted a Seward Planning and Zoning Commission recommendation to make the BRGC lease program voluntary and to allow home owners and/or occupants to build their own bear resistant garbage containment systems.

Currently Alaska Waste leases BRGC's manufactured by Bear Saver in a few neighborhoods in Anchorage for \$5 per user per month and in Kenai/Soldotna for \$8.25 per user per month. We have heard that in Anchorage the BRGCs gets beat up and are only considered to have an effective life span of 3 years. In Seward there has been very little damage to the BRGCs and we are confident that the manufacture's recommended life span of 5 years is applicable. We would hope that Alaska Waste could lease BRGC in the Seward area for about \$5 per user per month.

Links to a Juneau program for building your own garbage can containment system will assist in the implementation of this component: <http://www.juneau.org/bears/Build.php> or http://www.juneau.org/bears/PDFS/2002/CBJ_garbage_storing_tips1.pdf.

2nd Recommendation: Update chapter 14 of Seward's Municipal Code to replace the term occupant with occupant and/or owner.

One key point that has emerged as a result of several public meetings is the realization that dumpsters are a significant part of the problem. At several locations bears are clearly targeting dumpsters for food. Unfortunately, BRDL cost about \$880 each to purchase and there is also a few hours of labor required for installation on an existing dumpster. At the

very least, any new dumpster provided or purchased within Seward should have a BRDL. Replacing the term occupant with occupant and/or owner throughout the Seward Municipal Code section 14, will clarify residential responsibility and aid in enforcement of the City Code related to dumpsters.

3rd Recommendation: Update the collection fee schedule to make the 96 gallon bear proof can rate equal to the rate for an additional container pickup rate (\$1.42 per week or \$6.16 per month versus the current \$10.76/mo)

Since the current trash collection rates place a significantly increased fee on those people who utilize the 95 gallon BRGC, many people have been discouraged from using this most effective trash can. This is in direct opposition to the goals of the Seward WCCP, the Seward Police Department and the Planning and Zoning Commission. Therefore, it is recommended that the rates for the 95 gallon BRGC be reduced to be equal to the fees for people who use a third garbage can (which is an equal volume). If people who use the large BRGC are charged more than those who use a 3rd common trash can, they will be effectively penalized for the use of this BRGC.

Justifications: For the past 10 years negative bear-human encounters have been increasing within Seward neighborhoods. Bears have been documented seeking food in trash cans and other unsecured containment, including locked freezers. Bears have been documented following people, entering homes, and generally creating unsafe situations.

In the past two years the Seward Police Department has had to dispatch a number of bears due to persistent threats to people. Whenever a bear is dispatched, there is an increased risk to people in the immediate vicinity.

Other Steps the Seward WCCP has Taken: A Seward WCCP member has also made a concerted effort to provide educational outreach to youth and their families. The ADF&G Alaska Junior Ranger's program has been presented to over 50 children recently. This program gives kids a systematic training in bear issues, focusing on how to eliminate bear attractants from their yard. An official pledge is made by the youth and they are issued Alaska Junior Ranger badges. Finally, the kids take a yard evaluation form home to review the conditions around their home with their parents and siblings.

With encouragement from the Kenai Brown Bear Committee, Home Depot and COSTCO just started selling Bear Saver BRGCs for \$330 each. As a comparison, in September of 2010 RBCA got a quote for 30 Bear Saver BRGCs and they cost \$256 each (includes shipping).

Conclusions: The Seward WCCP wants to stress that these recommendations and other information included in this document are being provided with the intention to assist City in the production of related resolutions and bid documents. Members of the WCCP feel these are viable and fair recommendations to help address a complicated issue. The Seward WCCP took significant effort to include input from the general public as well as from many professionals who have expertise in managing human-bear conflicts.