

A Fact Sheet for Politicians Regarding Ontario's Objective to Deal with Black Bear Problems

I would like to believe that our elected representatives make decisions based on accurate information made available to them by experts on the subject & in the in the best interests of their constituents.

Relative to dealing with the so called 'nuisance bear' issue, this is obviously not the case and I believe that we need a reality check of what is needed and not another red herring that diverts attention from the solutions required to truly deal with the problem.

As I listen to the ongoing rhetoric and misinformation being disseminated by the media, special interest groups, as well as our elected representatives at all levels of government, I am saddened by the lack of fact based information that is being reported, to assist people to better understand and support what needs to be done to coexist with all wildlife, including bears in Ontario.

I would like to add some of this factual information to the discussion as to why a Spring Bear Hunt (SBH) will not achieve any of the objectives attributed to a return of a SBH and refocus on proven solutions to deal with the concerns being voiced by residents and our elected representatives.

Residents and politicians need to understand that neither the Pilot Project nor a full return of a SBH will solve any of the problems they are attributing to the loss of the SBH.

A two year pilot project will not provide any valid data to support a SBH, as anyone familiar with bear activity understands that nuisance behaviour is directly associated with:

- a. Variations in natural food supply
- b. Availability of attractants (both non-natural and natural) in communities.

These two things are the primary influences affecting nuisance behaviour, which of course will directly affect any possible conclusions that might be drawn from the Pilot Project. The key reasons stated for the Pilot Project or a full return of a spring hunt are noted and addressed as follows:

1. Public Safety

The issue of public safety in reference to potential attacks has been blown way out of proportion by the media and supported by a small vocal segment of the residents and special interest groups across the Province.

The situation has been exacerbated by continual misinformation equating encounters with attacks. Bear encounters and attacks have been sensationalized in all media across the North America for over a century creating an unrealistic fear of bears.

It is true that there have been unprovoked attacks by a very few rogue predatory bears but these attacks are extremely rare so let's put it into proper perspective.

In fact, there have been only 4 recorded fatal Black Bear attacks resulting in 7 fatalities by 4 male bears over the last 100 years in Ontario. (In just 30 years from 1982 to 2012 there have been 497 fatal attacks by dogs across Canada and the United States)

These unprovoked or predatory attacks that resulted in fatalities and serious injuries have almost exclusively occurred in more remote areas of Ontario, far outside of communities.

Many of the encounters reported as attacks were 'bluff charges' resulting in no physical contacts.

There has never been a Black Bear attack resulting in a fatality within any community anywhere in Canada.

There has never been any serious injury caused by an 'attack' by a bear that had entered a residence anywhere in Canada.

There have been injuries caused by a bear fleeing a residence and running over a person on its way out, but no reports exist to the effect that a bear actually attacked a person during such encounters.

So, if public safety, relative to Black Bear attacks is truly the real issue, we should look at the causes of such incidents and educate the Public on how to deal with and avoid them.

In this regard, 'provoked' bear attacks, which include the most recent one near Peterborough and the serious attack near Cochrane this year both involved dogs off leash in a rural setting.

Dr. Stephen Herrero, Professor Emeritus University of Calgary, a highly respected bear researcher with over 40 years of experience and a particular focus on Bear Attacks Their Causes and Avoidance (title of his book on the subject), along with his colleagues, just concluded a 3 year study of 92 Black Bear attacks across North America. The study determined that over half of these attacks involved a dog off leash.

Dogs on a leash outdoors or in a yard are in almost all cases a deterrent, as a bear has the opportunity to avoid the dog. Whereas, an unleashed dog in the open will most often create an avoidable encounter which can result in injury to the dog and its owner.

There is no proof that killing more bears during a SBH can in any way remove a potential predatory bear from the population.

2. Nuisance Bears

As a result of so much misinformation about bears, a Nuisance Bear Committee was struck in 2003, consulting across Ontario, with broad community, individual and group participation including 9 members from Northern Ontario, most of who were hunters.

One of the key findings agreed on in this comprehensive 2003 report is *that the Spring Bear Hunt had little to no impact on nuisance bear activity in communities!*

The idea that shooting more bears will reduce nuisance bear activity is not supported by any factual data. In fact, studies done by Dr Ed Tavss of Rutgers University, who looked at a dozen communities across North America from New York, to California to Alaska and including Elliot Lake Ontario established that increasing harvests had no appreciable effect on nuisance bear activity in nearby communities. Whereas implementation of comprehensive non lethal programs such as Bear Wise and Bear Smart had real and immediate positive impact on reducing nuisance bear activity in those communities.

Another study just completed by Adrian Treves and colleagues at The Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, University of Wisconsin supports similar findings-

Below are excerpts from their abstract on the study:

' At the statewide scale, complaints about agricultural damage, other property damage, or human safety concerns did not correlate with each other or with number of bears taken by hunters in the preceding 1-2 years.'

' We conclude that the Wisconsin bear-hunting season did not show clear evidence of reducing nuisance complaints during 1995-2004, probably because hunting was not effectively designed for that goal.'

'Nuisance bear activity is primarily a function of availability of natural food & even more importantly the availability of non natural foods available in a community.'

3. Potential Economic Impacts

The Spring Hunt issue for outfitters has been primarily an economic one, but they have continually tried to leverage the media into believing otherwise and that the hunt would reduce problem bears.

Many of these outfitters are far from communities where so called 'nuisance bears' are a problem, so removing bears in those areas would have little impact on the stated reason for a SBH.

As well, removing a nuisance bear by shooting or trapping and relocating it from its territory near a community opens the territory for another bear that might become a even more of a problem, if attractants are still readily available in the community, creating an endless cycle. Tourist Outfitters in general, have seen a dramatic decrease in American clients due to the economic disaster of 2008 along with the stronger Canadian Dollar. So even if a full SBH is reinstated the market potential and therefore income from the hunt would be dramatically reduced negating that as a reason for a return of the SBH.

Summary

So, do we really want to accept responsibility and deal with bears in communities based on proven programs or do we want to continue to look at ineffective measures like promoting a return of the Spring Bear Hunt which as noted above will not resolve any of the issues being promoted for its reinstatement.

WE ALREADY HAVE THE SOLUTION:

The MNR Bear Wise Program is one of the best, most comprehensive & effective programs of its type anywhere in the world, but it can only produce results when properly implemented & managed on a Provincial & Local level. It must be supported by each community.

Implementing Bear Wise fully in communities requires a local champion to facilitate and oversee the program over the long term.... In Elliot Lake Bear Wise is working for us without question!

Jim Johnston
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