

culture

The Bear Necessities

Everything you wanted to know about bears but were afraid to ask

by Joshua Ryan

The Oregon Bears, a queer social and service club that caters to more than 300 mainly furry members, became Portland's "bear necessities" about 25 years ago. This group consists predominantly of male members (though there are female bears, too!) and celebrates all types, trades and orientations of masculinity.

We're familiar with the bear stereotype: men with lots of hair and body types that, in politically correct terms, fall outside the more traditional (i.e., hairless, thin and young) stereotypes of what gay men look like. Think *Field & Stream* as opposed to the Abercrombie & Fitch catalog on your coffee table.

The Oregon Bears are part of a movement that began in the mid-1980s to encourage men to redefine traditional gay images. Since then, the bear movement has grown to be a worldwide organization comparable in size to the leather, drag and court communities.

"The bear movement started when masculine, husky, hairy gay men felt compelled to carve their own niche into society," says bear "expert" Jeff Glover. "Many of these gay men—including blue collar workers, rural folks and average joes—didn't socialize or identify with other gay men, because they didn't fit the stereotype. They often knew they preferred men, but didn't think they were gay."

But they are gay, according to Richard Wilde, president of the Oregon Bears. "There are all kinds of bears and cubs. We believe bears come in all shapes and sizes—and that what beats in your heart is what makes you a bear."

There is debate in the broader sexual minorities community about what makes a bear a bear. Some argue bears must have certain physical characteristics—for example, chest and abdominal hair, as well as being overweight. Other feel "real" bears must exhibit hypermasculine appearances and shun interaction with effeminate men.

In Portland, the Oregon Bears are clearly more open and inclusive. Members organize more than 50 social and fund-raising events throughout the year—most of which are free or charge nominal fees. The Oregon Bears have an active volunteer board and through their numerous events will donate more than \$8,000 back to the community. Their mission is simple: Make it fun and



Bears migrate to Portland every year for BearTown weekend.

accessible to be a bear, and give as much as possible to local queer charities.

Arguably their most popular event is the 11th annual BearTown weekend taking place June 8 to 11. Bears and cubs will come out of hibernation during the Portland Rose Festival for fun-filled festivities. The event's highlight is the selection of titleholders Mr. Oregon Bear and Mr. Oregon Cub. 

To register for BEARTOWN 2006 visit www.oregonbears.org.

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Upcoming Oregon Bear Events

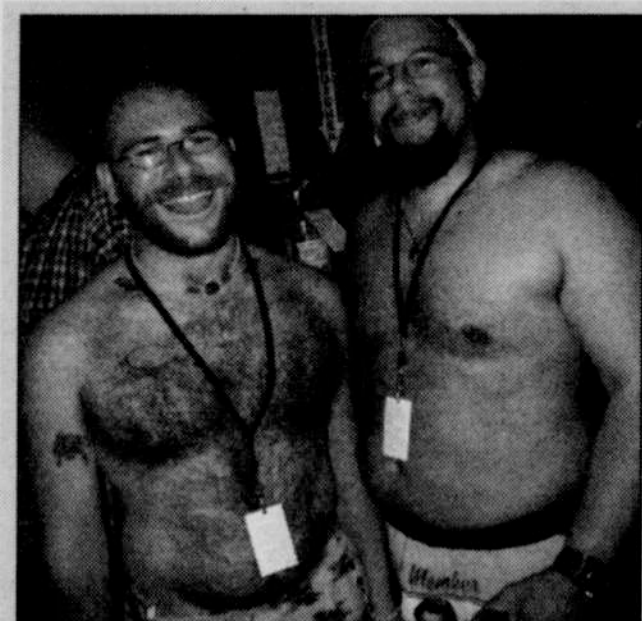
• **Camp Oregon Bears IX:** Bears embrace masculine events, and what is manlier than an old-fashioned campout with 100 of your favorite furry friends? Even Sasquatch would feel at home! The ninth annual event is at Milo McIver State Park, 30 miles southeast of Portland near Estacada. There are space limitations, so make reservations now. Amenities include lots of trees, privacy and hot showers. Entertainment includes camping, lots of fellow bears and did I mention the Butt and Beard Contest?

• **Bears Softball Teams:** While not an official Oregon Bears event, three bears-oriented teams play in the Rose City Softball Association: PDX Bears, PDX Cubs and PDX Grizzlies. If you are a bear or cub, visit www.portlandgaysoftball.com and join the league—or, if you're an admirer, stop by a game and try to make it to first base with the bear of your choice.

• **Double X Dance:** This is a great way to learn about the Oregon Bears and get connected. The party starts 9 p.m. every fourth Friday of the month at C.C. Slaughters, 219 N.W. Davis St.

• **Oregon Bears Picnic:** Just when you thought it was safe to go back into the woods, the Oregon Bears will be at Overlook Park off North Interstate Avenue on July 22. This is a members-only event, so if you needed an excuse to become an Oregon Bears member, now's your chance.

• **Bears on the Rapids:** The Oregon Bears celebrate the near-end of summer Aug. 19 at White River in southern Washington. Riding the rapids with the bears promises to be a boatload of fun. Just don't talk to any weirdo playing the banjo, and remember, bears don't generally squeal like pigs.



Bear 411

• **Admirer:** Admirer means that you are not a bear or cub—but that bears in all their permutations make you hot! If you are sexually or romantically attracted to bears, give me a little "Grrr."

• **Bear:** A man with a beard or goatee, typically with a hairy chest and body and a stocky or heavysset build, often mature and displaying a masculine appearance.

• **Chaser:** Abbreviation for chubby chaser. You know who you are!

• **Cub:** A younger (or younger-looking) version of a bear, typically but not always with a smaller frame. The term is sometimes used to imply the passive partner in a relationship. An interesting side note: While

cubs might be perceived as being passive partners, when it comes to titleholders, Mr. Oregon Bear and Mr. Oregon Cub are considered equals.

• **Daddy Bear:** An older, generally huskier guy sometimes looking for a daddy/son relationship or a bear cub.

• **Grizzly Bear:** An older bear with a large, wilder beard (e.g., Grizzly Adams).

• **Panda Bear:** An Asian bear. Kinda cute, eh?

• **Otter:** A relatively new term describing a man who is hairy but not large or stocky—typically thinner, or with lean muscle.

• **Woof:** A greeting sometimes used when a bear

spots another bear in public and wants to express physical attraction. He will make a growling noise or say "Woof!" Notice that in movies, straight men can be heard woofing at hot women. Breeders are always copying us.

• **Manatee:** Derogatory term for a heavysset, hairless bear. While manatees are cute on the Discovery Channel, being compared to a gentle, slow-moving sea mammal that grazes along water bottoms probably is not a compliment.

• **Fluffy:** Derogatory term for a campy or effeminate bear. I guess some boys are girly no matter what they do.

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