

Long Beach wrestles with bear woes

Plentiful food draws bruins into the heart of resort community

By NATALIE ST. JOHN
EO Media Group

LONG BEACH, Wash. — Mayor Bob Andrew recently held a meeting with wildlife managers and local officials to discuss strategies for preventing human-bear encounters inside city limits.

Despite wildlife managers' well-publicized efforts to relocate or kill "problem bears" over the last two years, Long Beach Police Department log entries show the animals continue to make forays into Ilwaco and Long Beach. Long Beach police have recorded 10 bear-related log entries this year and a total of about 50 since Jan. 1, 2014. These records also show that cutting off access to garbage would prevent the majority of bear-related incidents.

Seeking bear solutions

Councilman (and mayoral candidate) Jerry Phillips said in a phone interview the May 7 meeting was initiated

at the request of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. In attendance were Long Beach Police Chief Flint Wright, representatives from Peninsula Sanitation, wildlife Deputy Chief Mike Cenci and other WDFW staff.

The meeting was not an official city workshop and other city council members were not invited — some said they did not even know about the meeting until it had happened. Phillips said he was invited to attend because he is the president of the Merchants' Association. Andrew did not respond to email and phone message requests for comment last week.

Phillips said local WDFW staff wanted to hear suggestions from city leaders about how to discourage contact between bears and humans. During the meeting, WDFW staff said strategies that prevent bear encounters are much more effective than trapping, killing or relocating. Those methods have removed a few particularly aggressive bears, but they are costly, labor-intensive tactics that don't address the root causes of the problem.

"The common thread is trash. How do we control our trash?" Phillips said. He has been researching methods Alaska communities have used to keep bears away from



NATALIE ST. JOHN — EO Media Group

A tranquilized bear's grasp on a tree in Safari RV Park was loosened by a Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife officer last year in preparation for relocation to a less-populated area.

garbage. Some options include using bear-proof trashcans, or passing an ordinance that limits the hours when citizens can have their trash out.

"The answer is not going out and killing every bear," Phillips said.

Lots of contact

Locals have had a number of remarkable bear encounters during the last year. An Ilwaco woman was tried for allegedly feeding bears on the de facto nature reserve she'd created

in the Sahalee neighborhood. Ilwaco High School and Long Beach Elementary School were both placed on temporary lockdown when bears were spotted roaming around campus. In July, a rash of garbage raids in downtown Long Beach led WDFW officials to authorize Long Beach Police to shoot the "suspect bear" who had grown disturbingly bold. Two night-shift officers killed the bear in July. In November, a mother bear and her two cubs got spooked while

foraging for garbage inside of Safari RV Park and climbed a tree in a resident's back yard. WDFW officers used tranquilizer darts to shoot the bears out of the tree. They were relocated.

This spring, the continued presence of bears prompted Barb and Chuck Kelly, Mill Creek residents who own a vacation home here, to write a critical letter to the mayor and other local officials, urging them not to "let bears run around the city streets."

"We bought a place in the city, close to 'town,' so that we could walk to the movie theater, many restaurants ... coming home often in the dark. But now all of that has been taken away from us, because of this inexcusable lack of action on your part!" Chuck Kelly wrote. "I know of no other city where bears can be free to inhabit, and I guess be a citizen of it, too. I'd like to see the taxes they pay."

Kelly said the city's practice, of advising citizens to secure their trash cans, "is not acceptable."

Food is the issue

In an interview after the meeting, Cenci said the driving factor behind almost all of the encounters is "an abundance of food available, both from people leaving garbage

and from fruit trees." The Police Department log entries clearly support this claim.

More than half of the 51 log entries involved bears getting into garbage cans — most recently, on May 24, a resident on Main Street in Ilwaco fired a rifle in the air after he saw a bear going through trashcans. Another 12 incidents described bears prowling in parking lots and yards. These were probably searching for garbage, but the police didn't specifically cite garbage in the reports.

The garbage-related incidents describe similar scenarios: Bears usually waited until the period between 2 a.m. and 5 a.m., then tipped unsecured trashcans to get at the stinky treasures inside. Roughly half of these occurred at private residences or along residential streets. The remainder occurred at commercial properties and public facilities, where dumpsters can provide an overwhelming temptation.

Bears have gotten into trashcans at the elementary school, the Neptune Theater, the Chinook Observer, and the Worldmark condominiums.

Shooting the bear that frequented the Bolstad approach and Super Eight last summer didn't solve the problem. This spring, a log entry noted that bears are still "ransacking" the motel's garbage.

Two Cannon Beach women arrested for possessing meth

The Daily Astorian

CANNON BEACH — Two women from Cannon Beach were arrested for methamphetamine possession early Thursday morning.

At 12:02 a.m., Cannon Beach Police Officer Josh Gregory pulled over a vehicle at 84806 Junction Road at the U.S. Highway 101 and U.S. Highway 26 junction. The occupants — Wendy G. Phillips, 33, and Kathleen J. Skinner, 47 — were discovered to have metham-

phetamine in their possession. Both subjects were charged with possession of a controlled substance.

In addition, Phillips was charged with fugitive arrest, and Skinner was charged with distribution of a controlled substance (methamphetamine). They were taken to Clatsop County Jail.

Altogether, 22 grams of methamphetamine were confiscated. Though Gregory found the narcotics himself, K-9 Officer Gunner was deployed at the end of the search.

Astoria awards recognize historic preservation

The Daily Astorian

The Astoria Historic Landmarks Commission has chosen Justin Power for an award for historic preservation for his work on the Thompson House.

Power, of Astoria, was recognized in the residential category for the preservation of the house at 778 38th St.

The Dr. Edward Harvey Historic Preservation Award is given out annually to property owners who have completed exterior restoration or beau-

tification of buildings that reflect the historical and architectural heritage of Astoria.

Power will receive a certificate at the June 15 Astoria City Council meeting.

The Historic Landmarks Commission also recognized Astoria Brewing Company with an honorable mention for the restoration at 1196 Marine Dr. The building had been known as the Fisher Building.

The award will be presented at the commission's June 16 meeting.

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