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Black Bear Response Guide

INTRODUCTION

An effective wildlife management strategy must balance the needs of wildlife with those of the public. Protection of life and property is a priority, along with considering what is best for the black bear population.

This guide provides a standard approach in deciding black bear management responses. It is a resource for government staff who must act in situations of conflict where clear, concise and consistent direction is needed. The guide supports the province’s Black Bear Management Plan (2017) and is the result of collaboration among biologists, enforcement officers, and problem wildlife specialists. Except in national parks, this guide will apply to specific events involving black bears throughout the province, including lands within provincial parks and protected areas. The guide is reviewed annually and revised as required.

The guide also shows Albertans how human-black bear incidents will be handled. Staff will use the guide as a reference to communicate with stakeholders and the public about managing human-black bear conflicts and to promote public and community support for black bear conservation.

PREVENTATIVE ACTION

Preventative action is the first response in most situations where a black bear has not presented an immediate threat to humans.

Preventative actions include:

- Assess situation/monitor;
- Close area to public access;
- Educate by providing information on wildlife behaviour and presence;
- Remove or order removal of attractants;
- Allow access by groups only;
- Erect electric fences around camps and/or attractants;
- Limit access through timing restrictions;
- Allow hard-sided accommodation only (no tents or tent trailers);
- Use hazing or aversive conditioning on site by trained personnel; and
- Hard release involves release soon after capture and usually at the capture site, with harassment.

Often, preventative actions may be sufficient to prevent future incidents. For example, if a black bear is utilizing areas of natural foods in close proximity to humans, then closing the area to public access until the bear leaves the area, or by removing the attractant, will effectively prevent potentially dangerous encounters. Preventative actions are often the appropriate first response.

USING THE GUIDE

If preventative actions have proven insufficient and control actions are deemed necessary, this guide will be used to determine the appropriate response. The guide relies on the results of an incident investigation along with assessing the black bear age/sex classification, behaviour, and known conflict history, to enable staff to determine an appropriate response option for a human-black bear conflict incident. Black bears have known behavioural patterns that, when combined with location, time and other factors, may indicate an incident is probable. It is unlikely however that the guide anticipates all possible situations. Where situations do not fall cleanly within the guide, staff will make decisions that most closely follow the guide.

INVESTIGATION

Reports of human-black bear conflict or property damage will be investigated by trained government staff. The aim of the investigation is to collect evidence, including witness reports and physical evidence that will provide an accurate account of the bear's actions, as well as any human activity involved.

CLASSIFICATION

Four main factors are used to help determine an appropriate response to humanbear conflict or property damage. They include the age, sex, and family status of the animal (female with cub, orphan, etc.), the animal's behaviour, location of the incident, and its known conflict history. For

example, a black bear that has been involved in conflict in the past will be classified differently than one that has no history.

An experienced Fish and Wildlife Officer or, in Provincial Parks, a Conservation Officer, will make these determinations based on evidence collected during an investigation, and may call upon other technical experts to assist with the evaluation. The subsequent response will be based on these factors as outlined in the guide.

The following age-based descriptions are used to classify the type of black bear involved in an incident:

- Cub: < 12 months
- Orphan Cub: < 12 months not accompanied by adult
- Young: A cub or yearling that is accompanying the mother
- Adult: > 12 months

A bear is further classified based on its behaviour:

- **Habituated:** A habituated black bear shows little or no perceived reaction to people. This is an animal whose presence could be interpreted as, or lead to a public safety risk. A habituated bear may frequent developed areas or areas of high human use, or may feed on natural foods within or adjacent to developed sites or in areas frequented by people such as roadsides, campgrounds, or ranch yards. Preventative actions should be used on a black bear classified as habituated. If actioned and the black bear has dependant young, all members of the family group will be classified with and actioned the same as the mother.
- **Food-conditioned:** A black bear that has learned to associate people (or the smell of people), human activities, human-use areas, or food storage receptacles, including for agriculture, with anthropogenic food. The black bear regularly uses unnatural food materials (such as garbage, pet food, compost, bird feed, or livestock food) that have been reasonably secured from black bears. It repeatedly feeds on agricultural crops or other anthropogenic food sources in close proximity to humans and is considered an imminent public safety risk. If the black bear has dependant young, all members of the family group will be classified with and actioned the same as the mother.
- **Depredation:** A depredation black bear has attacked, killed, or is an immediate threat to a pet or livestock animal. If the black bear has dependant young, all members of the family group will be classified with and actioned the same as the mother.
- **Offender:** An offender black bear is one that presents an apparent threat to human safety or has had contact with, injured or killed a human after being provoked (i.e. the black bear's actions were the result of, or response to, actions by the human). An offender bear will not always require capture, for example if the bear's response was defensive in nature and the contact was not prolonged. If the black bear has dependant young, all members of the family group will be classified with and actioned the same as the mother.
- **Predator:** A predator black bear is one that has killed a human and either fed upon or concealed the body, or has stalked, pursued, chased or ambushed a human

(unprovoked) resulting in black bear-human contact, whether or not the victim was killed or injured. If the black bear's young participated in the attack or fed upon the victim or if the young are still dependant on the mother, then all members of the family group will be classified and actioned with the mother.

An animal's history is also used to determine an appropriate response, taking into account the number of times the behaviour of a particular black bear has been rated against this guide. This history will be informed by strong evidence that the conflict history is associated with the individual in question. For example, DNA and marked bears provide the strongest level of evidence towards the history. Depending on the severity of an offence, multiple occurrences related to the same bear in a short period of time, during which no capture occurs, will be interpreted as a single offence. In some instances, a black bear will be captured, radio marked, and monitored as part of a research or an aversive conditioning program. Such a capture event will not be counted as part of the bear's conflict history.

RESPONSE

If a bear needs to be captured by culvert trap, snare, or immobilization it will be done in accordance with the established departmental standards and procedures. The following chart identifies the types of responses based on the age, behaviour and history of the bear.

When lethal removal is determined to be the appropriate response, the action will follow the Canada Council on Animal Care Guidelines.

If an orphaned black bear cub(s) is involved in a conflict situation and is capable of remaining in the wild as per Alberta Environment and Parks Orphan Black Bear Rehabilitation Protocol (5+ months, adequate fat reserves, and is assumed to be in healthy condition), it will be actioned as an adult with the same conflict history. If an orphaned black bear cub does not meet the above criteria and is involved in a conflict situation, the appropriate Regional Problem Wildlife Specialist, Regional Wildlife Biologist, and Provincial Carnivore Specialist will discuss and decide on a legitimate option for the cub(s).

CAPTURED BLACK BEAR FATE CHART

**PREVENTATIVE ACTION WILL BE THE INITIAL RESPONSE BEFORE THE DECISION IS MADE TO CAPTURE (see above)
THE RESPONSE CHART RELATES TO BEARS CAPTURED AS THE RESULT OF A CONFLICT INCIDENT**

BEHAVIOUR RANK	HABITUATED / FOOD CONDITIONED		DEPREDAATION		OFFENDER/ PREDATOR
HISTORY RANK	1	2	1	2	1
BEAR TYPE					
Adult	RL / EU	EU	RL / EU	EU	EU
RESPONSE TYPE					
RL- Relocation within Bear Management Area					
EU- Euthanasia					

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