

westvancouver

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PARKS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

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May 12, 2009

File: 2150.24

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Dear ()

Re: Encroachment of Bears into Residential Areas

Thank you for your April 13, 2009 letter to Mayor and Council which has been referred to me for response. I will try to give you a short summary of events over the past decade regarding bear management issues, and address the concerns you have expressed in your correspondence.

As you may be aware, bear management falls within the jurisdiction of the Provincial Government under the Wildlife Act. The Act is enforced by the Conservation Officer Services (COS). In 2002, after several years of declining budgets, there was simply insufficient Provincial conservation staff to manage the bears that were visiting the North Shore. The COS would deal only with "life and limb" situations, and their only option for dealing with black bears was to shoot them.

With increasing bears visiting the developed areas, many bears were being destroyed, and some neighbourhoods became more and more protective of them. The community began to petition West Vancouver staff, as well as Mayor and Council, in order to find solutions that did not always result in the destruction of the bear.

In year 2003, the drought in our forests, pushed the bear population down from their usual habitat into populated areas. Finding ample food sources in our garbage, fruit trees, and birdfeeders – the bears remained. Many did not go into hibernation and lived in the community all winter.

In 2004 alone, the West Vancouver Parks department received almost 4,000 calls, far beyond what was manageable. Community volunteers became more involved; the North Shore Black Bear Network grew and became an integral part of our management plan. Today, this plan now involves all three North Shore municipalities, the Provincial Government, and volunteers.

The COS, although unable to fund enough Conservation Officers to deal with the issues, realized that using lethal force as the only tool was increasingly unpopular. In an effort to respond to community interest, the Province began a program called "BearSmart."

The fundamental idea behind "BearSmart" is if the community supports and lives up to the principles of the program, the Conservation Service would offer a variety of solutions rather than simply killing bears. The program is partially funded by the Province, but implemented by the municipality. It includes education and changes to waste management bylaws (such as the one you suggested in your letter). On September 29, 2008, the Solid Waste Utility Bylaw was amended and approved by Council. This amendment enforces that garbage may only be taken to the curb on the morning of collection instead of the night before.

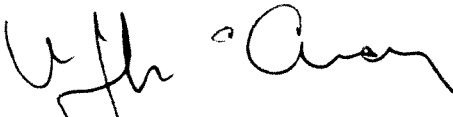
We have not solved all the problems, but over the past four years, calls to the West Vancouver Parks department have reduced dramatically. Although the COS occasionally has to destroy a bear - that is used as a last resort. As you mentioned in your letter, bears entered two houses last year on separate occasions. In one instance, the mother and her cub were re-located and the other instance, the bear left the area when staff tried to trap it.

One of the problems, and solutions, with "black bear management" is that these animals are territorial. Simply getting rid of a bear does not guarantee that the area will remain "bear free". In some British Columbia towns, the use of lethal action is still the only repose to control bears. They shoot one bear after another and as each new bear is killed - another comes into the area. We have had about 20 bears in the greater West Vancouver area for the last 8 years or so. We believe that is probably about the ecological carrying capacity of the area. It seems that the best way to keep a community safe is to try to manage the behaviour of the local bears which then keep "new" bears away.

We have found that all bears - whether resident or newcomers - quickly find any available food sources. It is by managing those food sources that we have had success in most parts of the community. Bear proof garbage containers are now available from Roland's Machinery. We have also had success with electric fencing as an alternate deterrent - it is relatively inexpensive and very effective.

I hope that you will find this information useful and that it addresses some of your concerns. Please feel free to contact me if you require further information. I can be reached directly at (604) 925-7143 or via email at bmccuaig@westvancouver.ca.

Yours truly,



Bill McCuaig
Community Forester

cc: Mayor and Council
Grant McRadu, Chief Administrative Officer
Anne Mooi, Director of Parks & Community Services
Bob Sokol, Director of Planning, Lands & Permits
Corinne Ambor, Acting Manager of Parks

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April 13, 2009

Mayor Pam Goldsmith-Jones
District of West Vancouver
750 - 17th Street
West Vancouver, B.C.
V7V 3T3

Dear Madam Mayor Pam Goldsmith-Jones,

RE: Encroachment of Wild Bears into West Vancouver Residential Areas

The purpose in writing to you is to express my deep concern with respect to the wild black bears now inhabiting the lower level West Vancouver residential areas.

We have owned and lived in the above property since 1978, over the years the bears in our residential area have substantially increased, by Municipal Hall allowing residential building higher up the mountain slopes, in bear habitat – forcing the bears into “our areas”.

I’m a retired British Registered Professional Engineer with many years of international major construction and commissioning experience. We lived in Johannesburg, South Africa for nine years, we never had lions roaming down the streets, and had there been, they would have quickly been dispatched.

My work in Canada was in major construction sites vis: 1978 Syncrude Tar Sands – Fort McMurray, peaking at 10,000 workers, grizzly and black bears were common food scavengers, in and around the construction camp kitchens. Due to the large work force – all bears were dispatched. It’s my experience that all bears in Canada are unpredictable grizzly, black and polar bears. (We have approximately 55,000 residents in West Vancouver – and asked to cohabit with Black Bears.)

Black bears are dangerous and kill people and are capable of aggressive behaviour. They quickly become accustomed to human activity, causing them to develop aggressive food-seeking habits, making them more dangerous.

Over approximately seven years, having brought in West Vancouver employees and Bear Watch etc. - they have given the opinion black bears are nothing more than a “simple” nuisance, leave them alone he’s just resting! Nothing could be further from the truth.

- 1.0 Turning to local conditions. Bear incursions in the () are frequent each year. In 2005, at a cost of \$1,400, we had our apple tree removed and two maple trees planted by Davey Tree Ltd. Also, we have removed our bird feeder.
- 2.0 In this immediate area, houses have: apple trees, bird feeders, put household waste out over night before pick-up. (over the past eight years this has been addressed by local authorities, to no avail).
- 3.0 I'm not prepared to record all bear problems, however suffice to say, damage to broken fences have been extensive and repair costs expensive.
- 4.0 July, 2008, I was charged by a vicious black bear through a picket fence and laurel hedge (300 lbs, 6 feet high) in my back garden whilst connecting a garden hose.
- 4.1 West Vancouver Police were notified – 911 did not respond!
- 4.1.2 Black Bear Watch told me to phone Victoria – who subsequently notified some wildlife office in Surrey!
- 4.1.3 Municipal Hall sent Mr. Larry McHale (Forestry Supervisor) who gave me a brochure how to live with bears, informing the bear was not dangerous! However, I noted he had a gun, bear spray and klaxon.
- 4.2.0 Your strategy to coexist in the residential areas with bears is a failure – exposing the residents to danger, then eventually killing the bear.
- 4.2.1 Your strategy has deprived us of the past pleasures of our garden, I have to carry bear spray, klaxon and chainsaw!
- 4.2.2 The situation needs to be addressed, because if it was your child being mauled you wouldn't want the bear there.
- 4.2.3 Your strategy is a recipe for trouble. Council should pass bylaws enabling: Bylaw Officers/Police/Conservation Officers, the right to enforce and fine individuals into compliance.
- 4.3.0 At present the bears are becoming “semi-domesticated” wild animals used to feeding on household waste, fruit trees etc. Therefore, the Council could consider supplementary feeding the bears, at a location high up the mountain, thus keeping them out of residential areas.
- 4.3.1 Once you have depleted the bears outside source of food, they will break into houses seeking food – this can become extremely dangerous to occupants within. Also necessitating dispatching the bear. The principle which must be grasped is that when we speak of a house being broken into, we are considering not only an offence against property, which it is, but also, and often more alarming and distressing, an offence against the person.

However, there is a long-standing, almost intuitive belief that our homes should be our castles. The concept suggests impregnability and defence against intrusion.

- There have recently been several cases of bears breaking into homes – therefore your strategy has failed.
- 4.3.2 As you have the authority to force residents to coexist with wild bears, I am of the opinion, you must accept full responsibility and financially compensate for all costs to damaged property and injuries to people, this may be covered under the Municipalities Insurance?
- 4.3.3 The responsibility of your Government is to protect your residents not to harm them, but your strategy does not achieve this.
- 5.0.0 In negotiating development contracts i.e. developing up the mountain. Costs for moving and protection of all wild life can be charged to the developer i.e. relocating the bears to another distant territory. You may want to investigate this area and costs, thereby putting responsibility where it belongs – the developer not the taxpayer.
- 5.0.1 With your strategy, we are being imprisoned in our homes. As Conservation Officers do not respond even when a dangerous situation is present, and Police Officers request them. Faster response times and more forceful control is required – tranquilize and remove the bear from the area, before it becomes necessary to kill it.
- 6.0.0 No person likes to see bears dispatched and cubs orphaned, firstly you are endangering residents which results in killing the bear – whereas preferably interceding before this by having no bears in residential areas.

However, the paradox of the situation is your strategy effectively results in the bears death.

- 6.0.1 Your first priority is to ensure the safety of all West Vancouver residents, the second priority is the correct relocation, safety and feeding of the bears away from humans and residential areas.
- 6.0.2 The wildlife rehabilitation area for orphaned bear cubs on North Vancouver Fromme Mountain, is essentially a good move.

I await the favour of your reply.

Yours truly,

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- c.c. All Councillors
- c.c. Ms. L. Holitski, Manager, Bylaw & Licensing Services
- c.c. West Vancouver Police

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