



INFORMATION REPORT

TO: Chair and Members Planning Committee	WARD(S) AFFECTED: CITY WIDE
COMMITTEE DATE: November 6, 2012	
SUBJECT/REPORT NO: Ministry of Natural Resources Bear Wise Program (PED12210) (City Wide) (Outstanding Business List Item)	
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SIGNATURE:	

Council Direction:

At the June 13, 2012 City of Hamilton Council Meeting, correspondence from David O'Toole, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Natural Resources, respecting changes to the Ministry's Bear Wise Program, was received and referred to the General Manager of Planning and Economic Development for a Report to the Planning Committee.

Information:

Correspondence from the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) dated May 3, 2012 (attached as Appendix "A" to this Report) announced changes to the Bear Wise Program resulting from a review of how programs and services are delivered by the Province.

The MNR is committed to reducing preventable causes of human-bear conflict in Ontario and works with all community leaders to establish local prevention programs. They also offer many education and awareness products including a website and a bear information and reporting line. The Bear Wise Program educates people about what they can do if they encounter a bear and things they can do to keep bears away from urban and semi-urban areas.

The MNR works with the Ontario Provincial Police and local Police forces throughout Ontario in responding to reports of human-bear contacts/incidents, and provides support in emergency situations. The City's Animal Services staff also assists in emergency situations as required.

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While most aspects of the Program will remain, the MNR advises that they will no longer be providing individual site visits to assist property owners with site-specific conflicts with bears and no longer will they trap and relocate bears.

An MNR information sheet is attached as Appendix "B" to this Report. Note that injuries to humans by black bears (the only type of bear in Ontario) are rare and only on extremely rare occasions have black bears attacked humans (i.e. only about 40 occurrences in North America in the last century with only six of those incidents occurring in Ontario).

Staff has no concerns with the announced changes to the Bear Wise Program as bear sightings in Hamilton are rare (last bear sighting in Hamilton occurred in July 2004 in the vicinity of Greensville), and the MNR will continue to provide support in emergency situations.

It would now be appropriate for the Planning Committee to remove this item from the Committee's Outstanding Business List.

SO/dt

Appendix "A" to Report PED12210 - MNR Correspondence dated May 3, 2012

Appendix "B" to Report PED12210 - Facts About Black Bears

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Resources

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May 3, 2012

Dear Chief Administrative Officer/Clerk:

I am writing to let you know about some changes the Ministry of Natural Resources is making to the Bear Wise program.

As part of our Transformation Plan announced in the 2012 Ontario Budget, the ministry conducted a review of how we deliver programs and services to Ontarians. The Bear Wise program was part of that review.

Bear Wise has set a solid foundation, helping municipalities and the public to reduce preventable human-bear encounters. In fact, no other jurisdiction in North America has provided this level of support to communities.

Today, eight years into the program, awareness of Bear Wise is high and many municipalities have good, robust bear wise strategies in place. As a result of the program, the public is better educated about what to do when they encounter a bear. In this regard, Bear Wise has achieved its main goals, and the time is right to transition from an active management model to one that places a greater emphasis on personal responsibility.

Most aspects of the Bear Wise program will continue, including:

- operating the toll-free Bear Reporting Line (1-866-514 -2327) 24 hours a day, seven days a week from April to November, with trained staff handling calls and determining the appropriate response
- educating the public about black bears and bear behaviour in Ontario
- providing advice to municipalities, the public, and other stakeholders about what they can do to keep bears away from urban and semi-urban areas, and how to manage problem bears
- tracking and collecting information about human-bear occurrences
- maintaining our comprehensive website to assist Ontarians with tips to ensure that their properties are not inviting to bears.

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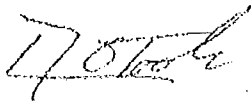
The ministry will continue to support the Ontario Provincial Police and local police services in responding to emergency situations. However, moving forward, we will no longer provide individual site visits to help landowners who are having site-specific conflicts with bears, and the ministry will no longer trap and relocate problem bears. Trapping and relocating has always been our least effective tool to manage problem bears, with research showing that many relocated bears simply return to the area from where they were removed.

Responsibility for managing human-bear conflicts continues to be shared between the province and local governments. The investments municipalities make in bear wise strategies, whether it's a public awareness campaign or bear-resistant waste management infrastructure, will result in long-term savings and cleaner, safer and healthier communities. Going forward, the ministry will continue to provide advice and support to municipalities on how to manage bears, as we do for other wildlife species.

Senior ministry staff have already been in contact with the Ontario Provincial Police regarding the Bear Wise program changes. Where formal or informal agreements exist with local municipal or First Nations police forces, ministry staff from the districts will be following up with their contacts in the police services.

If you have any questions about these changes to the Bear Wise program, please contact the district manager for your area. Contact information for district offices is available on our website at www.ontario.ca/mnr. Click *Contact Us* from the top toolbar, and then *Where to find MNR services* from the toolbar on the left.

Sincerely,



David O'Toole
Deputy Minister

Be Bear Wise – Facts About Black Bears

Courtesy of the Ministry of Natural Resources

- Black bears are generally timid and avoid encounters with people, but they can come into conflict with people especially when natural foods are scarce.
- Black bears are large, powerful animals. Adult males can weigh 120-280 kg (250-600 lbs.). Adult females can weigh 45-185 kg (100-400 lbs.). Black bears are not normally aggressive towards humans, however, on extremely rare occasions, bears can be dangerous.
- There are about 75,000 to 100,000 black bears in Ontario.
- Black bears are active from mid-April to late fall in most parts of the province.
- Most black bears enter their dens by mid-October in the north and by early November in central Ontario. However, bears will stay out of their dens longer when fall foods are abundant.
- Black bear cubs are generally born in January while their mothers are in their dens. Cubs stay with their mothers for approximately 16-18 months following their birth.
- Between early July and late September bears typically double their body weight as they prepare for winter hibernation. Black bears do not eat or drink while in their winter dens.
- Black bears are omnivorous (they feed on both plants and animals).
- Black bears feed mainly on summer and fall berry crops such as raspberries, blueberries, and mountain ash, as well as acorns and beech nuts in the fall.
- Natural foods vary greatly in abundance from year to year. Bears may look for other food sources more actively in the spring if the previous year's food supply was poor and they are in poor condition. They may also look for alternate food sources in late summer and fall if the current year's food supply is poor. Consequently, food or garbage around homes, cottages and campsites will become attractive to bears.

What You Can Do

- Put garbage out in the morning of garbage day, and not the night before
- Do not leave pet food outdoors
- Thoroughly clean outdoor grills after use
- Fill bird feeders only through the winter months
- Do not put meat, fish or sweet food (including fruit) in your composter
- Keep meat scraps in the freezer until garbage pick-up day
- Pick all ripe fruit off trees, and remove vegetables and fallen fruit from the ground
- Use electric fencing to protect valuable trees, orchards, vegetable and berry patches

How to Recognize a Potentially Dangerous Encounter

Injuries by black bears are rare, but can occur in the following situations:

Cornered bears

Black bears may become anxious or annoyed if they are crowded by people or dogs, or if intently focused on a food source. These bears will generally give many warning signs (they may make huffing or “popping” sounds, swat or beat the ground with their forepaws or even bluff charge) to let you know that you are too close.

Mother bears protecting their young

Mother bears are rarely aggressive towards humans, but they are protective of their cubs. Do not test this by intentionally approaching cubs or knowingly getting them between them and their mother. The mother bear will generally give you warning signs to let you know they are too close.

Predatory black bears

On EXTREMELY RARE occasions, black bears (usually adult males) have attacked humans with the intent to kill and eat them. This has happened about 40 times in the last century in North America (six incidents in Ontario). By comparison, many more people have been killed by lightning, dogs, and bee stings. Predatory black bears may not make huffing or “popping” sounds, swat or beat the ground with their forepaws or perform bluff charges. Instead, they may press closer and closer to their intended prey assessing whether it is safe to attack.

Here is what to do if you find yourself in one of these situations.

- Slowly back away, watching the bear.
- If the bear tries to approach you, stop. Be aggressive, yell, throw rocks or sticks and use pepper spray if you have it. NEVER TURN AND RUN.
- If the bear continues to approach you, resume backing away slowly while continuing to be aggressive towards the bear.
- If a bear makes contact with you, DO NOT PLAY DEAD. Fighting back is the best chance of persuading a black bear to stop its attack. Use a large stick, a rock or anything else that you have on hand to hurt the bear.

Be Bear Wise – What To Do If You Encounter a Bear

Bears are normally shy of humans and quickly get out of our way when they see us. There are a number of things you can do if you spot a bear on a trail or one enters your campsite or yard.

- Do not approach the bear to get a better look. **Slowly back away** while watching the bear and wait for it to leave.
- If you are near a building or car, get inside it as a precaution. If the bear was attracted to food or garbage, make sure it is removed after the bear leaves to discourage the bear from returning.
- It is important to keep dogs away from a bear. While a well-trained dog may deter a bear, a poorly trained one may only excite it, resulting in the bear following the dog back to it's owner.
- If a bear is in a tree, leave it alone. Remove people and dogs from the area. The bear will usually come down and leave when it feels safe.

If a bear is trying to get at a food in your yard or campsite (and a building or a car is not within reach) or if a bear tries to approach you, here is how you should react:

- Stop. Face the bear. Do not run. If you are with others, stay together and act as a group. Make sure that the bear has a clear escape route, then yell and wave your arms to make yourself look bigger. Use a whistle or airhorn if you have one. The idea is to be aggressive and to persuade the bear to leave. This will work if the bear is still partly afraid of humans.
- If these attempts fail to frighten the bear away, slowly back away watching the bear and giving it a wide berth.
- Climbing a tree to get away from a bear may offer you little advantage as black bears are excellent tree climbers.
- A bear may stand upright to get a better view, make huffing or "popping" sounds, swat or beat the ground with its forepaws or even bluff charge. These are a bear's way of telling you that you are too close. Back off and give the bear more space. If the bear comes within range, use pepper spray if you have it.

In an immediate emergency call your local police or 911.