**Correspondence**



Jeff Selinger, Management Coordinator

Cyndi Wardlow, Regional Supervisor

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

333 Raspberry Road

Anchorage, AK 99518-1599

 July 6, 2021

Dear Mr. Selinger and Ms. Wardlow:

The Rabbit Creek Community Council (RCCC) greatly appreciates attendance at our May 13th meeting by your biologists, Cory Stantorf and Tim Spivey, to discuss neighborhood bear concerns. We are writing now to request assistance with the specific local problem we discussed then, and make recommendations for studies and potential habitat work that could help ameliorate the situation.

Ken Ziegahn has lived on Porcupine Trail in the RCCC area for about 45 years. Until about 5 years ago, Ken did not have bear issues on his property. Unfortunately, in the last several years, increasing numbers of bears congregate on his property, to the point where he wears a gun when he goes out to mow the lawn. A significant length of Rabbit Creek crosses his large, nearly 4-acre lot, before crossing Snowshoe Park on the east side of his property. In response to our suggestion that this neighborhood petition to become a Secure Trash Zone, Ken has indicated there is not a garbage issue attracting bears here: he waits with his garbage can in his truck and only puts it out when the garbage truck arrives. Other neighbors also implement good garbage practices. Rather it appears to be the salmon in Rabbit Creek that is causing this attraction and concentration.

We understand that your staff has visited Mr. Ziegahn in response to his calls, and agrees that he has done what he can to not attract bears to his property, e.g., added lights, cleared vegetation. At our RCCC meeting, neighbors made several suggestions, and others were later developed, for studies and habitat manipulations that may help us better understand and improve this situation, before there is a tragedy for either a bear or a person. Apparently a neighbor has already had to kill one sow which had become aggressive, and her cubs were also subsequently destroyed.

Recognizing that bears may also be a concern in other neighborhoods, but that they are a unique resource that helps make Anchorage such a special place to live, the first two recommendations, below, would also benefit areas beyond Mr. Ziegahn’s neighborhood.

1. The Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) should conduct a full census of bears in the Anchorage Bowl to provide information on the numbers and movements of bears throughout our area, and provide information to inform and implement more targeted bear deterrence. This should build on Sean Farley’s radio tag study of several years ago. Have bears increased? Are bears using other areas or the same areas? Are they spending more time in more densely populated parts of Anchorage? Incorporating information on how Anchorage’s population and land use patterns have also changed since the earlier study would also be important.
2. Recognizing that a full bear census is probably cost prohibitive when the state has been cutting agency budgets the last several years, can hair snares and cameras be employed along Rabbit Creek to provide an index or sample regarding bear numbers and use areas? Information from cameras on the presence of bears could then be shared with neighbors via Nextdoor, or our RCCC website or Facebook page.

Mr. Ziegahn believes that habitat conditions have changed on and around his property, not surprising over a 45-year period when Anchorage’s population has increased substantially (from about 174,000 in 1980 to just under 290,000 now) with a concomitant increase in habitat loss as roads, subdivisions and businesses have been developed, particularly in the southern part of the Municipality. Consequently, habitat analyses may be easier and less expensive than population studies to provide information and feasible options for reducing the bear risks in the Porcupine Trail area.

Other suggestions for addressing this problem include:

1. Conduct a habitat assessment to evaluate how the quality and quantity of bear habitat has changed, and habitat fragmentation has increased over the past 40-50 years. This could be done using factors such as aerial photos taken over the years, GIS data bases, and wetland assessments (the Municipality has been thoroughly documenting wetland habitat losses over the years), in conjunction with ADF&G data on the number, locations, and reasons contributing to nuisance bear calls over the years.
2. Conduct a stream habitat assessment of Rabbit Creek to determine why bears seem particularly attracted to Mr. Ziegahn’s property. If there are stream features allowing or encouraging salmon to hold up there, attracting bears, could the habitat be manipulated, to make it less attractive on Mr. Ziegahn’s property and more attractive somewhere farther from where people live, but so that the overall habitat quantity is not reduced? For example, could bears be encouraged to concentrate along Rabbit Creek in Snowshoe Park just upstream of Mr. Ziegahn’s property, with signage added during the salmon run to decrease use of the Park while the bears are present?
3. Monitor Rabbit Creek to determine when salmon move into the lower reaches of Rabbit Creek and when they move farther upstream, then share that information with neighbors so that they can minimize their activities along the creek for that specific period and concentrate on not engaging in activities that could create nuisance bears.
4. Should the neighborhood on both sides of Rabbit Creek petition to become a Secure Trash Zone to further decrease the potential for nuisance bears in the area?

We have been provided with a link to the ADF&G e-library for a copy of Sean Farley’s study on movements of radio collared bears in Anchorage that was undertaken several years ago, but could not find the final report there. We did find a link to the story map that nicely illustrates those movements, but the link to the more detailed information appears to be broken: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=livingwithbears.anchorageurbanbears> We would be interested in posting an active link to that work on our RCCC website to share with neighbors so they will have a better understanding of where bears have been, how they work Anchorage salmon streams, and what individuals should be doing to prevent conflicts with bears.

We recognize that many of our recommendations, above, will not solve Mr. Ziegahn’s problem. However, they should provide data to strengthen management recommendations as well as inform neighbors so they avoid creating nuisance bear situations.

We look forward to hearing from you about the feasibility of our recommendations to reduce the bear presence on Mr. Ziegahn’s property and help other Anchorage residents prevent conflicts with bears. Also, please let us know what the RCCC can do to help ameliorate this problem. We have a web site where we can post information; we have posted the information sheet provided to the Community Councils with ADF&G contact information. We are copying our State Representative Kaufman and State Senator Holland so that they are aware of this issue and can advocate for the funding ADF&G needs to respond to these neighborhood concerns.

Sincerely,

Ann Rappoport, Co-Chair Carl Johnson, Co-Chair

Rabbit Creek Community Council Rabbit Creek Community Council

cc: Ken Ziegahn Mid-Hillside CC

 Bear Valley CC Huffman-O’Malley CC

 Glen Alps CC Abbot Loop CC

 Representative James Kaufman Hillside East CC

 Senator Roger Holland