

Responsive Management



ANCHORAGE RESIDENTS' OPINIONS ON AND EXPERIENCES WITH BEARS AND OTHER WILDLIFE

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Conducted for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game

by Responsive Management

2009

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Responsive Management National Office

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study was conducted for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to help prioritize competing uses of and desires for public resources and to address management issues, including Anchorage residents' acceptance versus intolerance of bears and moose; potential reductions in the use of public trail facilities caused by fear of wildlife encounters; and public support for management options such as reducing wildlife populations, developing public information programs, and/or restricting trail development. The research entailed focus groups of Anchorage residents and trail users and examined their opinions on bears and moose in general, on problems with such wildlife, and on potential methods of managing bear and moose populations.

Three focus groups with Anchorage residents and trail users were conducted in Anchorage, Alaska, August 17-18, 2009. There were 10-12 participants in each group. In recruiting focus group participants, Responsive Management used a general population mailing that included a brief description of the focus group, a toll-free number to contact the recruiting manager, and a number designating the recipient's residence as being located in one of three regions of Anchorage. The focus groups were then conducted based on residents' likelihood of encountering bears in their neighborhoods: the first group was held with residents from Region 1 (the low bear density region), the second group with residents from Regions 2 and 3 (the high bear density regions), and the third group with trail users from all regions. The focus groups were conducted using a discussion guide developed by Responsive Management in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and lasted 2 hours. A telephone survey will follow the qualitative research discussed here.

Experiences with bears and moose were common: most Anchorage residents in the three focus groups had encountered or interacted with bears and/or moose at some point (moose encounters appeared to be the most common, followed by black bear, with brown bear sightings/encounters being the least common). Several people described incidents in which bears or moose had charged or threatened humans, and these participants expressed concern about the potential for negative encounters with a bear or moose. In general, the most common complaint regarding bears and moose concerned moose eating trees and vegetables and causing damage to landscapes and yards. Despite this, many participants appeared to support having such wildlife in the

Anchorage area, with support generally being higher in the high bear density group (those likely to have bears in or near their neighborhoods) and the trail user group.

Despite there being a considerable amount of concern over the potential for bears and moose to harm humans, a number of participants throughout the three groups appeared sympathetic to the needs of such wildlife. The population growth of Anchorage (and greater Alaska) was mentioned several times, and a few participants suggested that it is more important for residents to learn how to avoid attracting bears and moose to their neighborhoods than for wildlife to know not to come into neighborhoods (this being the inevitable result of wildlife being fed or garbage being left out). A repeated suggestion from focus group participants concerned the need for greater public education/outreach on how to avoid bears and moose, as well as the correct ways to interact with them in the event of an encounter.

Legal, regulated hunting was generally supported by focus group participants as a management tool, although a number of people worried about hunting in urban settings. Many focus group participants suggested that only “problem animals” ought to be dealt with through lethal means, and trapping and relocation were also suggested as potential means for reducing the number of moose and bears in neighborhoods and urban areas (although both of these activities were described as labor-intensive and expensive). In general, there was not great confidence in hazing methods such as cracker shells and rubber bullets—these were thought more likely to irritate a bear and not keep it away permanently. Additionally, “bear-free zones” were not widely supported or thought feasible.

The majority of focus group participants said they support the current regulations for residential garbage removal, although some suggested that many Anchorage residents simply do not follow the regulations. Enforcement of the trash regulation was also said to be inconsistent. Bear-proof trashcans were mentioned by a few people in each of the focus groups, but some said the cost for these would likely prohibit their widespread use. Some group participants expressed reservations about the reintroduction and stocking of salmon in Anchorage streams, saying that the availability of salmon attracts bears. Many participants said that it was best to avoid salmon streams whenever possible.

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

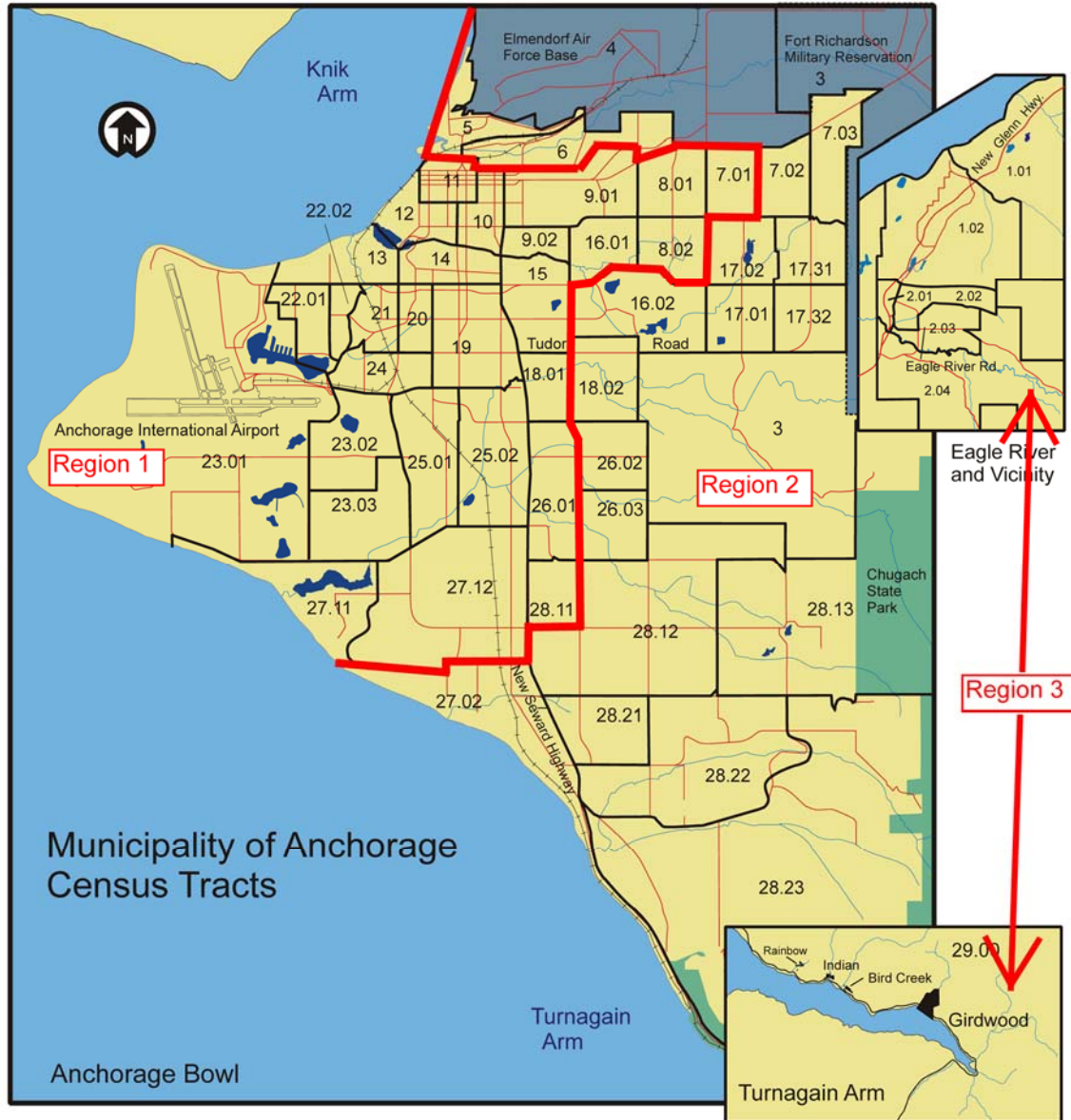
This study was conducted for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to help prioritize competing uses of and desires for public resources and to address management issues, including Anchorage residents' acceptance versus intolerance of bears and moose; potential reductions in the use of public trail facilities caused by fear of wildlife encounters; and public support for management options such as reducing wildlife populations, developing public information programs, and/or restricting trail development. The study also examines public knowledge of how to properly deal with bear encounters and determines how past experiences with bears affect attitudes toward relative risks and potential solutions. The qualitative research discussed in this report was conducted as part of a larger overall study that includes a telephone survey of Alaska residents.

This report discusses the results of three focus groups conducted with Anchorage residents, including residents who used local trails. Separate groups were conducted with residents from a low bear density region of Alaska (i.e., residents unlikely to have bears in their neighborhoods); residents from a high bear density region (i.e., residents likely to have bears in their neighborhoods); and trail users from all regions of Alaska (e.g., hikers, runners or bikers). The focus groups were conducted in Anchorage, Alaska, August 17-18, 2009. Specific aspects of the research methodology are discussed below.

Focus Group Recruiting

In recruiting focus group participants, Responsive Management used a general population mailing sent to Anchorage residents. The mailing included a brief description of the focus group, a toll-free number to contact the recruiting manager, and a number designating the recipient's residence as being located in one of three regions of Anchorage. The focus groups were then conducted based on residents' likelihood of encountering bears in their neighborhoods: the first group was held with residents from Region 1 (the low bear density region), the second group with residents from Regions 2 and 3 (the high bear density regions), and the third group with trail users from all regions. The map on the following page shows the Anchorage regional breakdown used to recruit focus group participants.

Anchorage Bear Density Regions:



Responsive Management screened all interested individuals using a standardized questionnaire of essential questions that determined whether the respondent met the established guidelines set for the group (for example, that they lived in an area of Anchorage applicable to the study). After determining that the respondent was eligible and interested in participating, the recruiter informed the potential participant of the focus group date, time, and location and mailed or e-mailed a confirmation letter. Participants were also offered a reminder call the day before the focus group to ensure that they had directions, were aware of the start time, etc. To encourage

participation, Responsive Management provided a monetary incentive to participants who attended the focus groups.

Responsive Management's focus group recruiting manager maintained a progress table for each focus group to track the number of participants recruited and to log participants' names, contact information, and essential characteristics. Generally, Responsive Management recruited 13-15 individuals, expecting that 10-12 would attend the focus groups.

Sample Group Size

A commonly encountered question about qualitative techniques and focus groups is one of sample size, and most qualitative techniques call for small sample sizes. The conclusions rest on face validity and rely on the depth of analysis rather than breadth of analysis. Focus group research, like all qualitative research, sacrifices reliability (i.e., the ability to replicate results) for the sake of increased validity.

Focus Group Locations and Facilities

Specific focus group facilities were selected based on availability in Anchorage, Alaska. All facility reservations were confirmed by written agreements; Responsive Management coordinated focus group room setup and food arrangements. Dinner was provided for focus group participants attending an early evening discussion, and refreshments were provided for groups scheduled for late evening.

Focus Group Moderation

The focus groups were moderated by Mark Damian Duda, Executive Director of Responsive Management. The moderator used discussion guides developed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and Responsive Management, which allowed for consistency in the data collection. New insights were sought through discussions to assess residents' opinions on bears and other wildlife, as well as any encounters or experiences they had had with such wildlife. The moderator kept the discussions within design parameters using the discussion guides without exerting a strong influence on the discussion content.

The moderator ensured that the room was set up appropriately, including furniture and recording equipment. All audio equipment was tested for functionality and recording quality prior to the group to ensure that all participants would be clearly recorded. After the discussion ended, incentive checks were distributed to participants. All focus group discussions were recorded on DVD for further analysis.

ANCHORAGE RESIDENT FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

GENERAL OPINIONS ON OUTDOOR RECREATION AND WILDLIFE ISSUES

- The moderator began by asking Anchorage residents what they considered to be the most important issues related to outdoor recreation. One participant in the low bear density group mentioned the need for disabled access to trails, while others talked about the threat of bears to recreationists using trails. In general, bear encounters (and to a lesser extent moose encounters) appeared to be the most important issue related to outdoor recreation for Anchorage residents in the low bear density group. Access issues were also discussed briefly in the high bear density group, as was the issue of bicyclists failing to obey traffic rules.
- After asking about general outdoor recreation issues, the moderator asked residents what they considered to be the major issues related to wildlife in the Anchorage area. In the low bear density group, there was some discussion about the reintroduction of fish species such as salmon into creeks and streams in Anchorage, a practice that several people said is to blame for attracting bears to the area. A few participants mentioned that bears appear to be much more prevalent in the Anchorage area now compared to 5 or 10 years ago. In the high bear density group, much of the discussion on this question concerned population growth in Alaska and the necessity for humans and animals to coexist.

Comments on outdoor recreation issues:

I'm a disabled vet and I think accessibility for trails is a big issue. Just to have places to go to access the trails system. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

Bicycles are a major problem in the city, and they need to be eradicated more than the bears. Sidewalks are not made for bicycles. They ride on the wrong side of the street; they cut in front of you; they're a nuisance. They don't follow the rules. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

My biggest issue is access, when I want to go backpacking. There are public use cabins and people book them ahead of time, and also there are a lot of things I want to do that I don't want to spend \$20,000 to have to experience. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

Comments on wildlife issues:

We have so many more bear issues now. Anytime my daughter goes hiking, I'm nervous. The number of incidents we've had is unnerving. There seem to be more negative encounters. There's a bit of fear; I'm not as comfortable going out in some places as I used to be.
– Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I'm concerned about [bear encounters] too. I choose my trails carefully because of that.
– Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I'm not far from Kincaid Park, and I use those trails quite a bit. My main issue is running across a moose. When you get down towards the bluff, there's some concerns. I basically use my bike, and I do a lot of skiing in the wintertime, and I've been pleased with my experiences.
– Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

If they don't do something about the fish in Ship Creek, there won't be any more fish in the creek. It's just such a popular spot for fishing. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

There's been a lot of reintroduction of salmon into other streams in the Anchorage area, and of course we're not allowed to fish for them. But we've got all this nice protein swimming up the streams. It's not a big surprise that the bears are coming back. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

The bears seem to be more of an issue now than they used to be. I do think that the fish bring the bears. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

Well, if you want your community to grow, people being here is something we have to deal with as a community, and how we interact with our environment. People aren't logical. They don't always think that moose or bear, although neat to look at—I mean, people feed them from their houses. We have a huge state and this is the largest concentration of the population. Can we not have a small area of the state where we can keep animals and people both safe?
– Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

A lot of folks with respect to wildlife are lazy. But if you feed a bear one time, he remembers it. And they have long memories. You have to get people accustomed to the fact that the bears were here first. We have to find a means to allow them to continue to exist without having to destroy them. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

Most people bring with them habits from other places and create a lot of problems for themselves. Trash is a huge problem. It's almost as if we have to keep clean campsites in our houses, as if we were camping. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

There could be more education, more flyers put out. I've had grizzlies in my backyard. My neighbors have big bags of garbage that sit there for weeks, and you can see it from the street.
– Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

KNOWLEDGE OF, EXPERIENCES WITH, AND ATTITUDES TOWARD BLACK BEARS, BROWN BEARS, AND MOOSE

- The moderator asked Anchorage residents to describe how they felt about having black bears, brown bears, and moose in the Anchorage area. Most people in the high and low bear density groups had encountered or interacted with bears and/or moose at some point, and a few participants in each group spoke about wildlife (usually moose) entering their yards or coming near homes or family members. Several people described incidents in which bears or moose had charged or threatened humans, and these participants expressed concern about the potential for negative encounters with a bear or moose. In general, the most common complaint regarding bears and moose concerned moose eating trees and vegetables and causing damage to landscapes and yards. Despite this, many Anchorage residents appeared to support having such wildlife in the Anchorage area, with support generally being higher in the high bear density group of residents.

- When asked if they thought there are too many, too few, or about the right amount of bears and moose in the Anchorage area, a number of residents in the low bear density group suggested that there are too many, insofar as bear/moose encounters are relatively common and are perceived as something of an ongoing threat to residents. In the high bear density group of Anchorage residents, participants appeared more sympathetic to the needs of wildlife, with a few residents pointing out that bears and moose have just as much of a right to the area as humans do. Population growth was again mentioned by a few people in the high bear density group, and several participants suggested that it is more important for residents to learn how to avoid attracting bears and moose to their neighborhoods than for wildlife to know not to come into neighborhoods (this being the inevitable result of wildlife being fed or garbage being left out).

- Participants were asked how they thought bears and moose affect the general quality of life for residents in Anchorage, and many people suggested that they enjoy seeing and having wildlife nearby, despite the occasional problems caused by such wildlife (property/landscape damage, garbage being eaten, etc.). Many participants in the high and low bear density groups appeared to accept the presence of bears and moose as a given, but also stressed that Anchorage residents have an obligation to learn appropriate ways to respond during

encounters or how to avoid encounters altogether. Again, support for the presence of bears and moose was generally more pronounced in the high bear density group of residents than in the low bear density group.

- As previously discussed, nearly everyone in the two Anchorage resident groups had encountered a moose at some point, and many said they had seen or encountered bears in the past (with black bear sightings or encounters being more common than brown bear sightings/encounters). The moderator followed up by asking if people in Anchorage are generally aware of how to handle such encounters, and many focus group participants said there is a considerable need for greater education on this topic. A few participants said that the potential for bear encounters could be greatly minimized through commonsense practices such as avoiding salmon streams and certain trails, especially during early morning hours and at dusk.
- When asked to describe their fear of being attacked by a bear or moose (in terms of a high, moderate, or low level of fear), the majority of Anchorage residents in the high and low bear density focus groups indicated a generally low level of fear, if any. Nearly all residents in the high and low bear density groups stressed the need for common sense and proper precautions, but the large majority (with just a few exceptions) did not suggest that they were constantly in fear of an encounter or attack.

Alaska has 549,000 square miles. If you really stretch it, the people inhabit about 4,000 square miles. We can have 1%, and the bears can have the other 545,000 miles. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

Anchorage has had problems trying to keep all the bears from coming into the towns. I've been stalked by bears, chased by moose. We just had a moose in the yard last Monday. There have been maulings, and they're going to have to do something about it. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

We've got a lot of raspberries and strawberries, and I'm surprised we haven't had more bears. But the moose are there all the time. They jump the fence and destroy everything. It's very scary. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

Our landscaping has changed, and it's a gourmet for the moose going down the street. I don't know that we can solve that, because we're not going to tear down our trees. But 30 years ago,

we didn't really have any landscaping. And now they're saying that the [wildlife] are becoming garbage hounds and eating the garbage. There are just more of them now. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I've seen women out there with small children, trying to get their kids to pet the moose! These idiots deserve what they get! Not everybody, but there are a number of them. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

The moose are right there in the front yard—they come through and eat the trees and you can't stop them. The bears, they bother me. I'd just as soon shoot one as worry about it later. Once they come around and become a problem, you have to get rid of them. Sometimes they go away, sometimes they don't. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I think they should start reducing the quantity of the moose, the bear, black and brown. There's just too many. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

Especially if you get a wounded one—a wounded bear is very scary. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

The moose don't bother me. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I agree. We've had moose around a little longer, but it's the people who go out and feed them. It's the peoples' interaction, the photographs, the petting. I'm okay with [moose] being there, but we probably wouldn't want a whole lot more. But I don't want to get rid of them all. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

If I'm walking my dog and I see a moose, I just turn around and go the other way. One time I looked behind me and saw a moose sort of trotting along behind me, and I ran up to a neighbor's door and rang the bell. Brown bear encounters are a headline story, but I don't think the moose really affect the quality of life. Although it's kind of a nagging thing—they eat my trees and vegetables. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I don't want to eliminate the bears. I just go somewhere else. That's that. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

You have these people who go fishing, bring the fish home, and smoke the fish. And that's bringing the bears into town. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

Depending on where you are, [the presence of moose and bears] can be detracting [from quality of life]. I don't mind if they say, "All the animals get to stay." But more and more, I can't protect myself from the animals. Pretty soon, I'm living in the animals' world. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I've seen a lot of bear, but never one that was an imposing danger to me or anyone around me.
– Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

How they get into town is beside the point—it's there. I don't know how you stop it, but I do know that they have bears running loose in Anchorage. They post signs that say "Bears in the area." And yeah, the signage is good. I haven't had too much experience with bears, and sometimes it wasn't that bad. A guy was charged last year and I believe it was a brown bear with cubs. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

When you have bear-human encounters, unless there's a gun involved, very rarely does it turn out well for the human. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

The messages [on how to respond when encountering moose or bears] are out there. But sometimes people don't listen. And we have a lot of new people [in the Anchorage area] as well. I would like to see a reduction of moose in Anchorage, but I enjoy seeing them, to a point. I want to keep my trees. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I look more closely at what's going on outdoors before I go. It was startling when I saw [a black bear]. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

We lost two very good people 10 or 15 years ago. A boy and his mother were hiking and just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. We're seeing more and more of those types of encounters. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

Memorial Day, late September—my fear of moose is high. The rest of the time, as long as they're more than five feet away, I don't care too much. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I am very uncomfortable with a bear encounter. I just think the chances are higher now than they ever have been in the past. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I've bumped into moose; I've been lucky. They're in my yard all the time. Brown bear? I worry about the ones stirred up, on a rampage. I have a baby and a three-year-old. Black bear? Where I've run into them, it's not been a problem. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

When I first came to Anchorage, Fish and Game said there were no brown bears within 20 miles of Anchorage. That was in 1980. All these people who just came to Alaska don't understand a bear. People who've lived here for a long time aren't as concerned, aren't as panicky. They're used to the bears being in the area. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I'm responsible for my garbage can; the bear's not. The problem we have is people. We don't have a bear problem; we have a people problem. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

To me, [having bears in the area] is one of the nicer things about living here. It's a complicated problem though—there's not one easy answer. You can't put down every bear who goes after some garbage. At the same time, you can't expect thousands of people to be responsible. The surprising thing is that hunting was allowed last year on the hillside, and only a few bears were taken. This is a recurring problem. People seem to be surprised that bears are getting into trash. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I've seen lots of black bears and lots of moose, but only a brown bear when fishing. I'd say there are too few brown bears, but I don't think that's necessarily a problem. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

What about some kind of educational process? How about something that's illustrated and educational for everyone, from children to old people like me. "This is what you should and should not do around bears." – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

Moving a bear is absolutely foolish; it's going to come back. There have been records of bears traveling hundreds of miles to come back to their original areas. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I think our biggest interaction between animals and humans is moose. Moose are all over the place. But I don't think moose are a problem; I think we're the problem to the moose. All of a sudden here comes September, and the bulls are starting to move, the cows are moving, and we're going to kill three or four moose on the mountain. People are on cell phones, listening to the music, talking to their buddy, and all of a sudden this moose is in front of them and through the windshield and somebody gets killed. I've flashed a lot of people and warned them about a moose on the road, but we have a responsibility to these animals as well. They've been here for a lot longer than I have. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

Sure, yeah, [these animals do contribute positively to the quality of life]. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I do like to hike, and I go out and do it, and I'm somewhat fearful every time I do. When you go out in Alaska, you're on the food chain. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

That's not correct—bears will only attack if you do something to provoke them. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I think if hikers have some kind of noise device, something noisy, to allow the bear to know that you're in the area, he's not going to bother you. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I enjoy having the animals around—maybe see a bird, a moose, take some pictures. I think that the animals are just one of the risks of living wherever you live. My husband jokes that in Alaska, you can see what's going to kill you, compared to little things like ticks and insects carrying diseases. But that's one of the reasons I like it here so much. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I think living here, [you get] the opportunity to view an animal living in its natural habitat. For a lot of people it's a thrill to be able to see [a bear or moose]. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I think everybody's had an encounter with a moose at some point. If you're on a hillside or on the fringes of town, you're more than likely going to run into a moose. I don't think many of these encounters are negative. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I don't think [most people know the right way to deal with wildlife during an encounter]. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

You have people here that have moved from other locations, where there wasn't as much concern [for bears and moose]. I think it's the naiveté of new people; these things don't happen very often but do happen, and they are part of the environment. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

Moose will eat any pumpkin, any pea plants; they mow down my raspberries, anything edible. The point is, if you have those in your yard, you have to understand [that moose will be attracted]. What food do moose love? Mountain ash. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

[Bears and moose] do make me nervous. I live in the city, not in the middle of nowhere. There are some expectations that I have: this isn't the woods and we should be safe from predators. But I would say I have a low fear of being attacked. The chances of me actually running into a moose or a bear that's going to attack me is very low. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I've had a number of run-ins hiking or biking. But I'm not so worried—I don't go out at 5:30 a.m. or at dusk; I don't go near salmon streams. All in all, the worst encounters I've had have been near garbage. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

OPINIONS ON BEAR AND MOOSE MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- The moderator asked participants in the high and low bear density groups what they thought should be done to manage bears and moose, and legal, regulated hunting was generally supported by residents as a management tool, although a number of people worried about hunting in urban settings. Many residents in the high and low bear density groups suggested that only “problem animals” ought to be dealt with through lethal means, and trapping and relocation were also suggested as potential means for reducing the number of moose and bears in neighborhoods and urban areas. In general, there was not great confidence in hazing methods such as cracker shells and rubber bullets—these were thought more likely to irritate

a bear and not keep it away permanently. Additionally, “bear-free zones” were not widely supported or thought feasible by focus group participants.

- Residents were asked if they had taken any special precautions in the past as a way to minimize their chances of encountering a bear or moose. In general, for both high and low bear density group participants, the presence of children in a household factored heavily into a participant’s perceptions of whether bears and moose posed a threat, and whether special precautions were necessary. On the other hand, a recurring comment from older participants without children living at home was that common sense should be the most important tool used to coexist and/or interact with wildlife. On this topic, several people again mentioned the need for public education and awareness, particularly for tourists and new residents of Alaska unaccustomed to dealing with bears and moose.
- The moderator asked about residents’ knowledge of and support for regulations on residential garbage removal, and a recurring comment was that while it makes sense for residents to avoid putting trash out until the morning of collection, many Anchorage residents simply do not follow the regulation. Enforcement of the trash regulation was also said to be inconsistent and somewhat ineffective. Bear-proof trashcans were mentioned by a few people in each of the focus groups, but some said the cost for these would likely prohibit their widespread use.
- When asked about the implications of salmon populations in Anchorage, participants (from both the high and low bear density groups) were nearly split in their support for the reintroduction and stocking of salmon in area streams: several participants said that they enjoyed the fishing opportunities made available, while others asserted that the availability of salmon attracts bears. Many in the high and low bear density groups said that it was best to avoid salmon streams whenever possible.

I think a hunt is a good idea. Generally, people hunting brown bear know what they’re doing.
– Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

There should be more information [regarding what to do during a bear encounter]. I don't see that we're ever going to get rid of them. You're not going to go out and put a fence around Anchorage. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I think they need a little more hunting of bears, blacks and browns. Cut down the numbers. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

Instead of a shoot-out at the OK Corral, I think trapping is a better option. Trap them and get them out. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

Why can't we do something to control the obvious rising population of bears in our area? Why do we have to wait until we have a big body count until we do something? Reduce their numbers close to Anchorage. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

Aggressive bears probably need to be shot. Ones that aren't aggressive, just being curious, maybe see about moving them out. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I just really feel that people are the problems. If you know there's a bear out there, stay away. If it's doing any danger, dart it and take it away. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

There are warnings right now but no management. If someone gets attacked because they're stupid and didn't read the sign—well, it still shouldn't be happening. If we're going to have Fish and Game, the police department, the fire department—they need to stop [bears] from coming into town. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I know there have been regulated bow hunts, and I think there's some potential there. I support some regulated hunting. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

They've tried moving them, and it's extremely expensive to do. And very limited success. Any of the bears that become accustomed to the better life here, find their way back. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

In our flower gardens, we don't plant plants that will attract [wildlife]. The giant cabbages attract all the moose. We replaced some things with plants the moose don't like, so yeah, we've definitely landscaped our house differently. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

The regulations [on trash and garbage] are fine but they don't enforce them. People aren't obeying them. A lot of people do [obey them], but a lot of people don't. All it takes is a few people [leaving out trash and garbage]. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

Not everyone follows the rules. You're supposed to take birdfeeders down, not put out your trash ahead of the pickup time. You're supposed to secure your trash, not throw out your plastic bags. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

It's ignorance. The population of Anchorage—a third of it changes every year. That many people move in, that many people move out. So with that churn rate, how can you expect people to learn everything about the regulations? – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

A lot of people ignore the regulations, or are just apathetic. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

You start putting fish in all these streams—I mean, this trails are used round-the-clock. The bears have been using them for years, and it might become an issue in the future. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

My bear-free zone is in my house. It's my loaded rifle zone. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I'd rather face a bear than a ticked off bear. Rubber slugs is the kind of thing that will annoy a bear. Firecrackers or whatever else that might frighten a bear—how far are you going to frighten a bear? The bear will run about a hundred yards, but at the end of that he'll quit. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

It depends on the circumstances. The rubber slug in a neighborhood could cause a bad reaction, could harm other people. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

They've tried hazing and harassing deer around airports, and they always come back. The only way to deal with it is to get rid of the animals that are the problem. That's the reality of it. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I think something like once a week or twice a month a five-minute spread on television as to what you do when you see a bear, or what to do to preclude bears from coming onto your property—simply keeping that in the public mind, would be very important. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I think education in schools is a way to get to the kids. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

You have to get to the parents. The worst encounters I've heard about are the trash bears, the ones that get acclimated to that—they get more brazen, less intimidated by people. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

Those people that leave the trash out—that sort of idea of “It doesn't matter what I do.” – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

The media also tend to sensationalize bear incidents. I understand that people have a right to know about the story, but not to sensationalize it. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

If the bears are finding our food, are they not having enough food in their natural environment to sustain life? – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

[Hunting is] absolutely a management tool to control bears. It's an essential part of it.
– Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

If you're going to give a certain number of permits to kill bears, why not allow [the hunters] to kill bears in populated areas? – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

Fifty years ago it wasn't a problem—a bear came in your garbage, you shot it. But now we have these one-acre lots, and the city wants to jam more people in, and we want small lots and apartment buildings—there's no place for the animals to go. As we grow into L.A. or Seattle or whatever, the mentality is not "Oh we love to see the bears," it's "Kill the damn thing, it's in my way." – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

You can have the hunts, but my concern is when the hunt becomes urban. It gets really difficult.
– Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

How much more stringent can they make [the regulations on residential trash and garbage]? It's a \$100 fine if you have a birdfeeder with birdfeed in it from April through September—if you get caught with one. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

The current regulations are not enforced. In Juneau, the trashcans got raided all the time.
– Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

Each year, depending on where the bears move in, the zones that Waste Management uses vary. So you can't change the regulations every year. So the regulations are adequate for what we've got. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

What about bear-proof dumpsters? People are lazy, though; they want to walk down their driveway and put out their trash. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

If you shoot a bear in your yard, you're in trouble. Real trouble. You'll get fined, you'll have to justify that the bear was about to kill your kid and that you had to do it in self-defense. They enforce that law very stringently. So they could turn that around and say, "If you bait bears by putting out your garbage, you're in trouble." – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I don't think the salmon is an issue. They're never going to stop that. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I don't think having salmon in the Anchorage area is an issue for bears. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

[The salmon streams] are only an issue if someone runs along a salmon stream and surprises a bear, and that goes back to common sense. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

And people will abide by that; you put up a sign that says, "Closed because of salmon—bears in the area." Not many people will violate that. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

What's the purpose of [a bear-free zone]? Are you talking about neighborhoods? Hiking trails? – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

[A bear-free zone] would not be going to the source of the problem. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

They use rubber bullets and the cracker shells in Juneau all the time—totally useless. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I think a bear-free zone is a ridiculous idea. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

Bears aren't stupid. After a while they're going to catch on, so I don't think the bear-free zone is a good idea. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I use two pieces of wood and bang them together and the bears run off pretty quickly. I've watched the police use the rubber bullets in Juneau, and I don't think it's very effective. They'll stop after 50 feet and it's like they weren't even hazed. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

AWARENESS OF AND OPINIONS ON BEAR AND MOOSE ATTACKS AND MAULINGS

- The moderator asked focus group participants in the high and low bear density groups to elaborate on what they had heard about bear and moose attacks and maulings, and (as previously mentioned) most people in each group had heard about such incidents. However, the majority of Anchorage residents in the groups appeared to view attacks and maulings as isolated incidents, and several others stated that bears and moose are simply one of the risks that come with living in Alaska. A few people in the high bear density group discussed precautionary behaviors like avoiding running or hiking alone, making noise when using trails, avoiding salmon streams, and generally paying attention to the surrounding environment.

If I'm going to go into an area where there's bear, I probably will not go unarmed. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I don't know that there's a whole lot of people that go up fly fishing when the bears are around. But a trail for bicycles and walkers—you expect to be able to use that. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

If people were having conflicts with bears, I'd be one of the smart people and learn from other people's mistakes. I generally stay away from salmon streams in the evening time. I stay away from a lot of the trails in the evening time. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

With the moose, it's kind of like when lightning strikes—you don't know when you're going to see one. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

I see most of the attacks as isolated incidents. Some bears are just not nice, just like people. But if you make enough noise, and the bear knows you're there, he will normally leave you alone unless he's grumpy. – Anchorage resident (low bear density group)

There's an inherent risk in living in Alaska and dealing with these kinds of things. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

You run the risk, just like anything else. You could hit by a bus tonight. I'm stretching the point, but you see what I mean. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

[Maulings] are not everyday [occurrences]. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

If you're going to run, make sure you go with a buddy who's slower than you are. The bears can hear you pretty far away. If you're making noise, they're going to hear you. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I think knowing the environment and knowing the reactions of the animals—know what a bear looks like. Know how a bear acts, the different signals. Do the best you can. And that will keep you out of 99% of problems. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I worry about the moose in the winter when I'm skiing. If you're going downhill and there's a moose at the bottom of the hill—I wonder if there could be a "moose-free" zone. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

[Temporary trail closures] are a good idea, yes. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

I think they do that now, mostly on the trails. Fish and Game close stuff all the time. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

They could put little information blurbs on the trailheads, have people rate them red, green, or blue. You know, just tell people—the chances of seeing a bear here is very good, or not so good. Maybe somebody from New York who's never done any hiking can say, "You know, maybe I should back off." You're not going to stop bear encounters. Give people options; we're all adults. – Anchorage resident (high bear density group)

ANCHORAGE TRAIL USER FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

GENERAL OPINIONS ON OUTDOOR RECREATION AND WILDLIFE ISSUES

- As with the previous groups, the moderator began by asking Anchorage trail users what they considered to be the most important issues related to trail use in the Anchorage area. Issues mentioned included the general convenience of the trails, the need for more trashcans, and the need for recreationists and hikers to follow the rules of the trails. When asked about major wildlife issues, several people mentioned the need for trail users to be aware of the potential for a wildlife encounter.

Comments on issues related to trail use:

I think everyone in the room uses a trail close to where they live. Being able to walk to a trail is great. – Anchorage trail user

Just being able to leave your house and walk is great. – Anchorage trail user

More trashcans would be great. You walk around with trash and you pick up somebody's other trash, and then you have to carry it out. – Anchorage trail user

The main problems tend to stem from people not knowing the rules of the trails, people walking backward on the trail or harassing the moose—things like that. But I'm generally quite happy [with the trail system here]. – Anchorage trail user

Comments on issues related to wildlife:

Moose is mainly what I run across. Moose is the main thing. Most of the time you can get by them without a problem. You respect their space, they respect yours. Kids harassing the moose—they do that. I remember watching boys do that when I was a kid. I'm sure their parents say "Don't do it." – Anchorage trail user

People just go out on these trails and I think they need to be educated on how to use these trails. It's not the animals' fault we're there. If you're going to use the trails, you need to know what to do on the trail. – Anchorage trail user

I like to be away from people, but when I go on the local trails I worry about wildlife. If I run into an agitated moose—I think people may hike sometimes and not realize what they're going to run into. – Anchorage trail user

If it's dirt or gravel, people seem to think it's less likely to have animals. – Anchorage trail user

KNOWLEDGE OF, EXPERIENCES WITH, AND ATTITUDES TOWARD BLACK BEARS, BROWN BEARS, AND MOOSE

- Comments in the trail user group did not differ greatly from those made during discussions in the previous two groups. Most in the trail user group indicated feeling very or at least somewhat knowledgeable about what to do during a bear or moose encounter (parents were often cited as the main source of information on how to react in wildlife encounters). As in the previous two groups, nearly everyone in the trail user group had seen a moose and a considerable number had seen bears (black bears again being more commonly seen than brown bears). There was generally a high tolerance and appreciation for bears and moose, although a few trail users suggested that humans come before animals in terms of the right to occupy Anchorage.

- Most in the trail user group said they had only a slight fear of moose and bears while using trails, but several people acknowledged that such species do pose a constant (though somewhat remote) threat to recreationists. It was generally agreed that while the potential for an encounter is ever-present, the chances of a negative encounter or an attack are fairly low. Common sense was again referenced as being the most important thing in coexisting with bears and moose. Only a few participants suggested that there are too many bears and moose in Anchorage, while the majority of the other trail users appeared to accept such wildlife as a given. A few people said they avoided certain trails or areas in the past based on bear/moose sightings, but most suggested that they did not go out of their way to continually avoid places in which bears or moose had been seen.

- As in the previous two groups, many trail users suggested the need for greater information and education on how people should react during wildlife encounters.

I've never seen a brown bear in Anchorage. I've seen only a few black bears. And I've had more moose encounters than I count on both hands. There are places in Kincaid where the moose are really seasonally bad. – Anchorage trail user

The moose don't bother me. I usually wait it out or go around. I have not encountered a black bear or brown bear on the trails here. I'd probably be more physically concerned that you could agitate one. What's the solution? I don't know. They were here first. – Anchorage trail user

I would disagree. I think I was here before the bears. I don't mind moose, but I don't want bears on the trails when I'm out there. I'm not talking about eradicating bears, but I think it's unreasonable to have bears in a city park. – Anchorage trail user

Brown bear in particular, they don't want to see you. If they knew you were there, they wouldn't want to be there. There are food sources in these parks, like the creek that runs north. You have issues with people not securing their garbage. The bears know what day is garbage day and they come for a free lunch. Why can't everyone have a bear-proof garbage can? – Anchorage trail user

What they require on the hillside is that you're not supposed to put garbage out until the morning of pick-up. But what good's the regulation? – Anchorage trail user

I love living in Anchorage because of the bear and moose, but I think if there are aggressive bears, I think something needs to be done. I see bears frequently. I've seen brown bear, black bear. There are aggressive moose; I have a friend who got trampled. She wasn't doing anything wrong, she was just in the wrong place. – Anchorage trail user

I don't know how many there are, so I couldn't say if there's too many or too few [bears in Anchorage]. – Anchorage trail user

In my opinion the number of bears is fine. It's not like I see them every day. I've only run into two or three in my life. I don't go out afraid; it's not my first thought. – Anchorage trail user

I personally think there are too many black bears. I know to make noise on the trails, but if you do startle a brown bear, you're not going to outrun it. I'm less concerned with black bear, but I did see a mom and her two cubs last year. I'll tell you what: I take my gun in the spring and if I see one, I'm not going to be afraid—if a kid got hurt, that's going to be tragic. Especially around schools. – Anchorage trail user

I don't think there are too many moose. I guess I don't have a sense of how many bears there are. I guess it does make Anchorage very unique. – Anchorage trail user

With the salmon, it seems like there would be easy fixes for that. I know it's inconvenient but like with Eagle River by the nature center, they try to close the trails sometimes. I don't know if there are too many bears. – Anchorage trail user

I don't know, if you look at it from the standpoint of, "All it takes is one," then yeah there are probably too many. The more people you have—I mean, people will eventually displace them. – Anchorage trail user

I think the bears are getting less and less afraid of humans. And I'm no biologist but I think that's the pattern it's going in. What's the purpose of having them near people, of taking the chance? – Anchorage trail user

I don't not use trails because of wildlife. I won't say, "Oh I can't go to that trail because last time there was a bear." And I don't think you could get rid of them all. Inevitably there will be some left, unless you kill off the whole species in the state. There was the law about putting trash out the day-of, but it's hard to enforce and we don't have the manpower. If people got tickets [for putting out trash early], it might change things. It boils down to people just doing what they're supposed to do. – Anchorage trail user

If I'm with a dog, [I'll avoid certain trails or turn around]. I'll go an alternative route. – Anchorage trail user

I've stopped mountain biking on the hillside, because it's too hard to make noise on a mountain bike, and it's just too much of a risk [running into a bear]. – Anchorage trail user

I'll carry bear spray, I have a gun; I don't carry it everywhere but I don't want anyone to get hurt or killed. I wouldn't want to live here if the animals weren't here. I like living here. – Anchorage trail user

I teach my kids, "Moose, run; bear, stay." It's a simple thing I teach the kids. It doesn't take much time to teach kids something that simple. – Anchorage trail user

Alaska is a big tourist state, and it's not [tourists'] fault they don't know, but I've seen them get in between a moose and a baby, and bad things can happen. It'd be great if they would provide more information in the schools. – Anchorage trail user

Don't go somewhere where there's a moose kill—that's just stupid. – Anchorage trail user

You put 300,000 people around parks with bears that could crush skulls just like that. There are issues, yes. – Anchorage trail user

OPINIONS ON BEAR AND MOOSE MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- As in the previous two groups, the moderator asked trail users about their opinions on management tools for controlling bears and moose. Most trail users were supportive of legal, regulated hunting as a way to remove certain animals causing problems, as well as a way to generally reduce the population of bears in Anchorage. A few people said that the stocking of salmon in Anchorage is certain to attract bears, and that management tools to curb bear/moose populations are almost beside the point as long as salmon stocking continues. A recurring comment from some (similar to comments made in the previous groups) was that lethal means should be reserved for specific problem animals, and that the indiscriminate hunting of any and all bears is unnecessary. As before, hazing tactics and bear-free zones did not receive substantial support from trail user group participants.

To me, the only kind of management there is, is [bear or moose] are either here or they're not here. – Anchorage trail user

If a bear charges one person, it has to go. – Anchorage trail user

It needs to be taken holistically—animals on trails is extremely narrowly focused. Salmon in the city, for example, equals bears in the city. Garbage. All of these things need to be taken into consideration. – Anchorage trail user

I think that if a bear or moose is aggressive, they need to be gone. Not all gone, but that one animal. – Anchorage trail user

What about the guy who shot the bear because he thought it was charging his friend in the backyard? I would do that if I thought it was charging my friend. But now he's going to get charged with discharging an arm within city limits. I mean, we live in Alaska. I'm sorry. – Anchorage trail user

I'm not going to hesitate if I think someone's life is being threatened. I'm not going to stop and think about Fish and Game regulations. – Anchorage trail user

I don't think bears wake up in the morning and say, "I'm going to go into town." They're walking through the woods and boom, they're in a town. – Anchorage trail user

They're kind of doing all right [in terms of management of the moose and bears]. – Anchorage trail user

I think it's stupid that Fish and Game introduced fish into urban settings that are going to attract bears. – Anchorage trail user

They have reintroduced the runs and boosted them substantially. There are now a lot of salmon. I'm concerned about the effect of drawing bears into the city. – Anchorage trail user

[In terms of supporting legal, regulated hunting of moose and bears], in general, yes. – Anchorage trail user

There's no way it's going to be an open hunt. They're going to be put out 10 people at most. I can't imagine much more. – Anchorage trail user

The bears are a very transient population. I would be in favor of some sort of well-researched hunt. – Anchorage trail user

I don't see a compelling reason to issue 10 bow-hunting permits—it's not going to make any dent in the wildlife population. It doesn't mean you're going to take out an animal that's going to charge somebody. – Anchorage trail user

You start shooting animals, they get scared. But you'd have to have a very regulated hunt. It's a good idea, but I don't know if it would work or not. – Anchorage trail user

I would probably prefer to pick out individual problem bears. When a citizen is a problem, we put them in jail. We don't go out and pick out 50% of the population. – Anchorage trail user

I'm for management of wildlife, but I don't really know what that is. It's always evolving according to the circumstances. I think a managed hunt would be one tool that might help, if it's needed to reduce the population. – Anchorage trail user

I'll go for a run with headphones on and there's a certain element of risk there. If I had my kids, it'd be different, but I feel like I can take care of myself. – Anchorage trail user

If you institute a program where everyone is required to have a bear-proof trashcan, it eliminates the need for a policeman to walk around and ticket everyone's garbage cans. – Anchorage trail user

[A bear-free zone] doesn't seem very cost-effective. – Anchorage trail user

Haven't they been using a particular breed of dog, a bear dog? They're a dog that comes from like, the border area of Finland and Russia, and they're extremely smart and will basically scare a bear away. – Anchorage trail user

AWARENESS OF AND OPINIONS ON BEAR AND MOOSE ATTACKS AND MAULINGS

- The trail user discussion on bear and moose attacks and maulings echoed similar discussions in the previous groups: a number of participants had heard about attacks or maulings, but the majority did not appear willing to drastically alter their recreational trail use because of such incidents. A number of people in the trail user group suggested that most moose and bears are not interested in attacking a human and are unlikely to do so. At the same time, most people in the group appeared to support trail closures in reaction to encounters or attacks, with some trail users saying that the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has an obligation to the public to close trails in such circumstances.

I think the encounters and the actual attacks run together. It's hard to separate them. – Anchorage trail user

If it was in an area that I normally deal with, I'd probably be hesitant [about going back] but I'd probably still use it. – Anchorage trail user

You don't want to go out to Kincaid in the fall. That's really scary. – Anchorage trail user

I've almost stepped on a moose, and I don't think they're going to get up and kill me. Some of them are so lazy. But I just kind of turn around and go on my way. – Anchorage trail user

[I think most attacks are] isolated events. – Anchorage trail user

Maybe I'm simple-minded, but I like [the idea of] running into bears because you live in Alaska. This is Alaska—it's not San Francisco or Seattle or Chicago. Most of us are here because it's Anchorage, Alaska. I'm sorry people have been hurt or killed, but if you're worried, there are other trails and areas to use. – Anchorage trail user

I think it's a shame that we have all these beautiful city trails that we have to close and shut down because there's bears around. – Anchorage trail user

I think Fish and Game has something of a public responsibility if there have been attacks, to say something. – Anchorage trail user

There's a lot of other ways to get killed here in parks beside bears. They can't get them all. If you want to step outside into Alaska, [then you're taking the risk]. – Anchorage trail user

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDES

Anchorage Residents Focus Group Discussion Guide

Introduction

Purpose: To better understand Anchorage residents' experiences with and opinions on wildlife in the area.

Rules

Please speak one at a time.

Please do not interrupt others; everyone will have a chance to speak.

Please be respectful of others' opinions, even if you disagree.

This discussion is being recorded so that I do not have to take notes and can follow along with the discussion. The recordings are reviewed back at the office, and comments extracted are never associated directly with your name.

Partners for this study are observing our discussion from the next room.

Please introduce yourself to the group, tell us your name, any outdoor recreation activities you may participate in, and your thoughts on wildlife in the Anchorage area.

General Opinions on Outdoor Recreation and Wildlife Issues

Please tell me what you see as the most important issues related to outdoor recreation in the Anchorage area.

What are the most important issues related to wildlife in the Anchorage area?

Knowledge of, Experiences With, and Attitudes Toward Black Bears, Brown Bears, and Moose

In general, how do you feel about having [SPECIES] in the Anchorage area? How about around your home or in your neighborhood?

Black bears

Brown bears

Moose

In your opinion, are there too many, about the right amount, or too few [SPECIES] in the Anchorage area?

Black bear

Brown bear

Moose

In your opinion, do [SPECIES] affect the quality of life in Anchorage? How? In what ways do [SPECIES] contribute to the quality of life in Anchorage?

Black bears

Brown bears

Moose

Have you ever seen a [SPECIES] in the Anchorage area or around your home?

Black bear

Brown bear

Moose

(IF YES) Please tell me about your experience.

(PROMPTS, IF NEEDED)

Would you describe your encounter as a positive or negative experience? Why?

Where did you encounter the [SPECIES]? Was it near your home?

Did you stop using or visiting the area where the encounter occurred? For how long?

Did you feel threatened or in danger?

What did you do or how did you handle the encounter?

Prior to your encounter, were you aware of recommendations or a "right way" to handle [SPECIES] encounters? (IF YES) Where did you get this information?

In your opinion, do [SPECIES] cause problems in your neighborhood?

Black bears

Brown bears

Moose

(IF YES) What types of problems do they cause?

How would you rate your fear of being attacked by a [SPECIES] in the Anchorage area? (High, Moderate, or Low?)

Black bear

Brown bear

Moose

Knowledge of Bears and Opinions on Bear and Moose Management Issues

What, if anything, do you think should be done to manage black bears, brown bears, and moose in neighborhoods, parks, and urban areas in Anchorage?

How do you feel about legal, regulated hunting of [SPECIES]? Why? How would you feel about public hunting for [SPECIES] as a way to control the [SPECIES] population in the Anchorage area?

Black bear

Brown bear

Moose

Next, I have some questions about bears in general, including both black and brown bears, as well as moose.

Do you take precautions to avoid problems or encounters with bears or moose in the Anchorage area?

(IF YES) What precautions do you take?

Residential trash and garbage is often believed to attract bears. How do you feel about current regulations for handling your trash in your area?

Would you support or oppose further trash restrictions? Why?

Are there any city ordinances or regulations that you think, if implemented, would help prevent problems or encounters with bears or moose?

Salmon populations also attract bears. Knowing this, how do you feel about having wild salmon in the streams in the Anchorage area? How do you feel about stocking salmon in area streams to provide fishing opportunities?

How do you feel about having a “bear-free zone” in Anchorage, which would be an area that would be managed by authorities to minimize the number of bear encounters?

What if keeping bears out of this area was expensive and required hiring additional city or state employees (how would you feel about a “bear-free zone”)?

How do you feel about hazing bears, or scaring bears off using techniques such as shooting rubber slugs and “cracker shells” to scare them off?

(IF ASKED: Rubber slugs seldom kill a bear but rather scare them off. “Cracker shells” are shells that explode in flight to produce a loud cracking sound to scare bears away.)

Awareness of and Opinions on Bear and Moose Attacks and Maulings

Have you heard anything about a bear attacking or mauling a human in the Anchorage area in the past 5 years?

(IF YES) Have you ever changed any of your behaviors or habits after hearing about a bear attack or mauling? How or what did you change?

Have you heard anything about a moose attacking a human in the Anchorage area in the past 5 years?

(IF YES) Have you ever changed any of your behaviors or habits after hearing about a moose attack? How or what did you change?

Do you believe that [SPECIES] attacks or maulings are isolated incidents or a serious problem in the Anchorage area?

Bear

Moose

What, if anything, do you think should be done to prevent [SPECIES] attacks or maulings?

Bear

Moose

Have you ever avoided or stopped using a trail or park because you heard about a bear or moose attack or encounter?

(IF YES) For about how long did you avoid the area?

How do you feel about limited trail restrictions or closures, meaning a few recreational trails in the Anchorage area would be restricted or closed to human use during times when the risk of encountering a bear is high?

How do you feel about building new public trails in areas where the risk of encountering a bear is high?

How do you feel about park closures when the risk of encountering a bear is high?

Final Comments

Do you have any final comments or thoughts about black bears, brown bears, or moose in the Anchorage area?

Anchorage Trail Users Focus Group Discussion Guide

Introduction

Purpose: To better understand the opinions of Anchorage residents who use local trails on wildlife in the area.

Rules

Please speak one at a time.

Please do not interrupt others; everyone will have a chance to speak.

Please be respectful of others' opinions, even if you disagree.

This discussion is being recorded so that I do not have to take notes and can follow along with the discussion. The recordings are reviewed back at the office, and comments extracted are never associated directly with your name.

Partners for this study are observing our discussion from the next room.

Please introduce yourself to the group, tell us your name, which local trails you use, what activities you use the trails for, and any other outdoor recreation activities you may participate in.

General Opinions on Outdoor Recreation and Wildlife Issues

Please tell me what you see as the most important issues related to trail use in the Anchorage area.

What are the most important issues related to wildlife in the Anchorage area?

Knowledge of, Experiences With, and Attitudes Toward Black Bears, Brown Bears, and Moose

In general, how do you feel about having [SPECIES] near or on the trails you use in the Anchorage area?

Black bears

Brown bears

Moose

In your opinion, are there too many, about the right amount, or too few [SPECIES] in the Anchorage area?

Black bear

Brown bear

Moose

In your opinion, does seeing [SPECIES] while using public trails in the Anchorage area affect your trail experience? How?

Black bears

Brown bears

Moose

(PROMPTS, IF NEEDED) Does seeing [SPECIES] positively or negatively affect your trail experiences in Anchorage?

Have you ever seen a [SPECIES] while using a trail?

Black bear

Brown bear

Moose

(IF YES) Please tell me about your experience.

(PROMPTS, IF NEEDED)

Would you describe your encounter as a positive or negative experience? Why?

On which trail did the encounter happen?

Did you feel threatened or in danger?

What did you do or how did you handle the encounter?

Did you stop using this trail or a specific portion of the trail? For how long?

Prior to your encounter, were you aware of recommendations or a “right way” to handle [SPECIES] encounters? (IF YES) Where did you get this information?

In your opinion, do [SPECIES] cause problems on the trails you use?

Black bears

Brown bears

Moose

(IF YES) What types of problems do they cause?

How would you rate your fear of being attacked by a [SPECIES] on the trails you use? (High, Moderate, or Low?)

Black bear

Brown bear

Moose

Knowledge of Bears and Opinions on Bear and Moose Management Issues

What, if anything, do you think should be done to manage black bears, brown bears, and moose on local trails? How about in local parks?

How do you feel about legal, regulated hunting of [SPECIES]? Why? How would you feel about public hunting for [SPECIES] as a way to control the [SPECIES] population in the Anchorage area?

Black bear

Brown bear

Moose

Next, I have some questions about bears in general, including both black and brown bears, as well as moose.

Do you take precautions to avoid problems or encounters with bears or moose on local trails?

(IF YES) What precautions do you take?

Are there any city ordinances or regulations that you think, if implemented, would help prevent problems or encounters with bears or moose on trails?

Salmon populations also attract bears. Knowing this, how do you feel about having wild salmon in the streams in the Anchorage area? How do you feel about stocking salmon in area streams to provide fishing opportunities?

How do you feel about having a “bear-free zone” in Anchorage, which would be an area that would be managed by authorities to minimize the number of bear encounters? What if keeping bears out of this area was expensive and required hiring additional city or state employees (how would you feel about a “bear-free zone”)?

How do you feel about hazing bears, or scaring bears off using techniques such as shooting rubber slugs and “cracker shells” to scare them off?

(IF ASKED: Rubber slugs seldom kill a bear but rather scare them off. “Cracker shells” are shells that explode in flight to produce a loud cracking sound to scare bears away.)

Awareness of and Opinions on Bear and Moose Attacks and Maulings

Have you heard anything about a bear attacking or mauling a human on a local trail or in the Anchorage area in the past 5 years?

(IF YES) Have you ever changed any of your behaviors or habits after hearing about a bear attack or mauling? How or what did you change?

Have you heard anything about a moose attacking a human on a local trail or in the Anchorage area in the past 5 years?

(IF YES) Have you ever changed any of your behaviors or habits after hearing about a moose attack? How or what did you change?

Do you believe that [SPECIES] attacks or maulings are isolated incidents or a serious problem in the Anchorage area?

Bear

Moose

What, if anything, do you think should be done to prevent [SPECIES] attacks or maulings?

Bear

Moose

Have you ever avoided or stopped using a trail or park because you heard about a bear or moose attack or encounter?

(IF YES) For about how long did you avoid the trail or park?

How do you feel about limited trail restrictions or closures, meaning a few recreational trails in the Anchorage area would be restricted or closed to human use during times when the risk of encountering a bear is high?

How do you feel about building new public trails in areas where the risk of encountering a bear is high?

How do you feel about park closures when the risk of encountering a bear is high?

Final Comments

Do you have any final comments or thoughts about local trails or parks and black bears, brown bears, or moose?

ABOUT RESPONSIVE MANAGEMENT

Responsive Management is a nationally recognized public opinion and attitude survey research firm specializing in natural resource and outdoor recreation issues. Its mission is to help natural resource and outdoor recreation agencies and organizations better understand and work with their constituents, customers, and the public.

Utilizing its in-house, full-service, computer-assisted telephone and mail survey center with 45 professional interviewers, Responsive Management has conducted more than 1,000 telephone surveys, mail surveys, personal interviews, and focus groups, as well as numerous marketing and communications plans, needs assessments, and program evaluations on natural resource and outdoor recreation issues.

Clients include most of the federal and state natural resource, outdoor recreation, and environmental agencies, and most of the top conservation organizations. Responsive Management also collects attitude and opinion data for many of the nation's top universities, including the University of Southern California, Virginia Tech, Colorado State University, Auburn, Texas Tech, the University of California—Davis, Michigan State University, the University of Florida, North Carolina State University, Penn State, West Virginia University, and others.

Among the wide range of work Responsive Management has completed during the past 20 years are studies on how the general population values natural resources and outdoor recreation, and their opinions on and attitudes toward an array of natural resource-related issues. Responsive Management has conducted dozens of studies of selected groups of outdoor recreationists, including anglers, boaters, hunters, wildlife watchers, birdwatchers, park visitors, historic site visitors, hikers, and campers, as well as selected groups within the general population, such as landowners, farmers, urban and rural residents, women, senior citizens, children, Hispanics, Asians, and African-Americans. Responsive Management has conducted studies on environmental education, endangered species, waterfowl, wetlands, water quality, and the reintroduction of numerous species such as wolves, grizzly bears, the California condor, and the Florida panther.

Responsive Management has conducted research on numerous natural resource ballot initiatives and referenda and helped agencies and organizations find alternative funding and increase their memberships and donations. Responsive Management has conducted major agency and organizational program needs assessments and helped develop more effective programs based on a solid foundation of fact. Responsive Management has developed websites for natural resource organizations, conducted training workshops on the human dimensions of natural resources, and presented numerous studies each year in presentations and as keynote speakers at major natural resource, outdoor recreation, conservation, and environmental conferences and meetings.

Responsive Management has conducted research on public attitudes toward natural resources and outdoor recreation in almost every state in the United States, as well as in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Japan. Responsive Management routinely conducts surveys in Spanish and has also conducted surveys and focus groups in Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese.

Responsive Management's research has been featured in most of the nation's major media, including CNN's *Crossfire*, ESPN, *The Washington Post*, *The Washington Times*, *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and on the front page of *USA Today*.

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