

May 18, 2006

## **Minister calls on Alberta communities to become "BearSmart"**

### ***Crowsnest Pass passes resolution to work toward becoming a BearSmart community:***

*Calgary...* Alberta launched the first phase of the Alberta BearSmart program on May 18, providing criteria and information materials for communities interested in becoming designated as BearSmart communities.

"Greater awareness will help safeguard both humans and bears from dangerous encounters," said David Coumts, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. "It will also cut down on the number of management actions needed to respond to bear conflict situations."

"Today, we're talking to communities and recreationists," added the Minister. "This summer I will also be talking to farmers about making their operations safer and to industry about building safe camps."

The Minister congratulated the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass for its foresight in passing a resolution this May to work toward becoming a Bear Smart community.

Mayor John Irwin of Crowsnest Pass joined the Minister in the announcement. "We have amazing country in southern Alberta and we have to realize that we share that landscape with bears. Last year alone, we had over 100 bear sightings and problem occurrences locally. I'm especially concerned that, as the Crowsnest Pass continues to grow and welcome more Albertans, we also have to look ahead to ensure that our planning considers bear activity."

"Our next step will be to educate residents and to work with the government on assessing our hot spots and potential conflict situations," added Irwin.

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development has already worked with the Town of Canmore, the Grizzly Bear Alliance, the Defenders of Wildlife and local residents in supporting the Bow Valley WildSmart program.

"I commend the residents of Canmore for the excellent work they've done," said Minister Coumts. "At the same time, you don't have to be a mountain community to experience bear problems. I want other communities, throughout bear country, to think about their role in achieving the balance between ensuring public safety and conserving bear populations."

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development has allocated \$240,000 this year to implement the BearSmart program across the province.

## **Backgrounder: Details on the BearSmart program attached**

### **Media inquiries may be directed to:**

Donna Babchishin  
Communications  
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development  
Edmonton  
(780) 427-8636

Russell Stashko  
Head, Enforcement-Field Services  
Southwest Region  
Fish and Wildlife Division  
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development  
(780) 723-8504

To call toll-free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

### **Backgrounder**

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*May 18, 2006*

### **Alberta BearSmart program aimed at protecting people and bears**

- **Keeping people safe**
- **Helping bear populations survive**
- **Reducing property damage and costs**

A key goal of the program is to bolster public safety, and reduce the number of human-bear encounters that result in injuries or property damage. It is also aimed at helping conserve black bear and grizzly bear populations-bears often suffer the consequences when they cross paths with humans.

#### **What you do really matters**

Simple changes in behaviour can prevent potentially dangerous situations. Albertans share responsibility for reducing encounters with bears, and can learn how to avoid providing bears with opportunities to obtain food. Food is the cause of most human-bear conflicts.

Through new materials and partnerships, Alberta will target BearSmart education to key audiences in bear country:

- Residents of communities in bear country,
- Ranchers and farmers,
- Outdoor recreationists, including hunters and anglers,
- Workers in the oil, gas and forest industries.

#### **Bear encounters**

Serious human-bear conflicts are rare in Alberta, but since 1993, there have been 27 significant incidents involving black and grizzly bears, with two human fatalities.

Between 2001 and 2005, an average of 2,300 bear-related occurrences was reported in the province each year.

The *Bears and Residents* brochure and other BearSmart program information is available on the Sustainable Resource Development website: [www.srd.gov.ab.ca/fw/bearsmart](http://www.srd.gov.ab.ca/fw/bearsmart), at Fish and Wildlife offices, and many parks and tourist facilities.

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**Backgrounder**

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**Alberta BearSmart Community program**

Alberta communities located in "bear country," or bear habitat, are regularly encouraged to implement best practices for bear safety, and to help reduce human-bear encounters. However, some may want to go even further than adopting best practices, and make a stronger commitment by participating in the Alberta BearSmart Community program. After meeting a number of exacting requirements over time, a community can earn designation as a recognized "BearSmart community"

Alberta BearSmart Community program

A community must implement a BearSmart plan that includes best practices and also implement bylaws that address the following areas:

- Household, industrial, commercial and municipal/town garbage management.
- Management of other bear attractants.
- Continuing education programs for residents and visitors.
- Commitment to non-lethal aversive bear management (using a variety of methods to give bears an unpleasant experience to teach them to avoid communities).
- Proper management and design of green spaces and corridors.

In co-operation with local Fish and Wildlife staff of Sustainable Resource Development, the community may undertake some or all of the following actions:

- Prepare a bear hazard assessment of the community and surrounding area.
- Establish a community-based BearSmart stewardship committee.
- Prepare a bear-human conflict management plan.
- Implement an education program.

- Implement and maintain a bear-proof solid waste management system.
- Monitor human-bear encounters.
- Where necessary, revise planning and policy documents.
- Implement and enforce Alberta BearSmart community bylaws.

### **Hazard assessment**

*The community will work with Sustainable Resource Development staff to gather information on high-risk areas within the community, and determine ways to reduce human-bear encounters. The assessment will identify non-natural foods and attractants, bear habitat and movement patterns, and how non-natural community features may influence bear travel.*

### **Municipal involvement**

Good community support is key to the program; in fact, groups or individuals may take the lead in promoting the initiative to the community. Town and municipal staff play an active role in implementing the program, such as:

- Adopting and actively encouraging implementation of BearSmart best practices.
- Implementing "bear smart" bylaws prohibiting the provision of food to bears as a result of intent, neglect, or irresponsible management of attractants.
- Committing to conducting a bear hazard assessment and designing a bear conflict management plan for the community.
- Revising planning and decision-making documents to be consistent with a human-bear conflict management plan.
- Assisting with distribution of information and educational materials.
- Developing and maintaining a bear-proof municipal solid waste management program.
- Participating on a multi-stakeholder BearSmart implementation team.

### **Provincial government involvement**

Critical to the success of a BearSmart program is support from various provincial agencies, including Community Development, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and Sustainable Resource Development. Provincial agencies should be engaged from the earliest planning phase of the program:

- Providing data on problem bear incidents and assisting in hazard assessments.
- Providing feedback on best practices needed within community.
- Advising on a non-lethal aversive conditioning program (using a variety of methods to give bears an unpleasant experience to teach them to avoid communities).
- Assisting with public education and outreach efforts.

### **Education**

Education efforts build community support by developing an awareness of the ecological, economic and human safety benefits of a bear safety program. A brochure that targets residents living in bear country can be obtained through the local Sustainable Resource Development office. Staff are available to answer questions. By learning about bears, people can begin to change their behaviour and develop greater understanding of how they can co-exist with bears.

### **For further information**

To learn more about the Alberta BearSmart Community program, contact your local Fish and Wildlife office or visit [www.srd.gov.ab.ca/fw/bearsmart](http://www.srd.gov.ab.ca/fw/bearsmart).

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