

## A Brief History of Bear Smart in Lions Bay

The Provincial Bear Smart Community Program, (which is coordinated and funded through the Conservation Officers Service) enlists support from local governments and residents to prevent human-bear conflicts. By encouraging resident education programs, bear safety presentations to schools and wildlife friendly waste management practices, this community program helps prevent more bears from becoming conditioned to human food.

Lions Bay began the process towards becoming a bear smart community in 2000, before knowing about the Provincial Bear Smart Program. In the late 1990's several aggressive bears that were breaking into sheds, homes and outside freezers, were eventually destroyed. Residents responded to the destruction of garbage-eating bears with a campaign to educate residents about bears, and lobby our local government to enact bylaws to reduce attractants and deal with wildlife waste management issues. By 2003 bylaws that addressed bear attractants were enacted, more information was available to residents about bears, and many public garbage containers were bear-proof.

Lions Bay enacted a wildlife friendly bylaw, continued to develop education programs for residents and bought more bear-proof public garbage bins, but the Bear Smart Community Program also requires communities to undertake Bear Hazard Assessments and Bear Management Plans to qualify for Bear Smart Community status. In 2004, Lions Bay began the official process towards becoming a Bear Smart Community with an application to the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection for funding. When funding was granted, the Village contracted a Bear Hazard Assessment. Between 2004 and 2006, Lions Bay received \$13,000 in Bear Smart grants that funded bear reports, more bear-proof public garbage bins, educational materials and more bear alert signs.

In 2005 a 'first draft' Lions Bay Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan was completed, combining recommendations from the Bear Hazard Assessment and requirements for a Bear Smart Community, with local knowledge and experience from bear volunteers. The Plan was adjusted several times before being approved by 2003/2005 Council (Mayor Douglas Miller, Councillors: Lisa Turpin, Chris Page, Elizabeth Jordan and Joanne Ronsley). The 'final draft' of our Bear Management Plan resulted from amendments discussed during additional meetings attended by former Administrator Lori Pilon, former Mayor Douglas Miller, and bear volunteers Lawrence Ruskin and Norma Rodgers.

2005/2008 Council (Mayor Max Wyman, Councillors: Linda Heneault, Birgitta von Krosigk, Lisa Turpin and Ken Wolder) adopted the Bear Smart Community Program in 2007 and established a Bear Smart Committee. Initial committee members include Chair and volunteer, Norma Rodgers, Councillors Linda Heneault and Birgitta von Krosigk, Village Administrative Assistant Anne Page, and Conservation Officer Chris Doyle.

It may be surprising that Lions Bay's Bear Smart Committee includes a Conservation Officer, since many bear loving residents have historically regarded the C.O.'s with distrust. For several years the COS has participated in similar committees with other communities, including Whistler, Squamish, the North Shore and Ucluelet. The current COS focus is working with Bear Smart communities to educate residents about attractant issues to prevent garbage-conditioned bears. Lions Bay's participation in the Bear Smart Community Program, bear education campaign, waste management practices and village bylaws, all increase our credibility with the COS. The Bear Smart Committee will be kept informed about bear management practices including location of traps and bear translocations. The residents of Lions Bay can

feel comfortable that Conservation Officers will work in partnership with the Village to keep our bears natural. Even though a bear causing problems here in Lions Bay might not be considered a good candidate for translocation otherwise, destruction of local bears, even tagged ones, will be a last resort because we are making an effort to control our attractants.

Since inception in 2007, Bear Smart Committee members have met monthly, with priorities to engage more Bear Watch volunteer participation, continue to develop education programs and adjust the 'final draft' of Lions Bay's Bear Management Plan to reflect current agreed upon Bear Smart policies and practices. Completion of a final Village endorsed Bear Management Plan is the final task before Lions Bay is eligible to apply for Bear Smart Community status.

In 2008, the Bear Smart Committee organized an April 'Living with Bears in Lions Bay' information night including visual presentations by Sylvia Dolson from Whistler's Get Bear Smart Society and Conservation Officer Chris Doyle, and several displays from North Shore bear groups. In May, a Bear Smart education booth at the garden show attracted lots of interest, and a Bear Smart presentation at our community school entertained as well as educated the students about bear safety.

In 2009 the growing Bear Watch network of residents communicated bear activity within the community and to the office. The office tracks bear movements from sightings calls and completes bear reports that are shared with Bear Watch and the COS. By creating a shared and complete picture of bear activity the best response for local bear problems is more accurately determined. In June there was a bear safety presentation for students at Gleneagles School by Christine Miller. "Bearology" books by Sylvia Dolson were presented to Gleneagles School and Lions Bay libraries.

The Village and Bear Smart Committee are subsidizing Rollins bear resistant bins for some residents with storage challenges, and there is now a central bear-proof dumpster available to residents with garbage storage challenges. Also, a new schedule of fines for waste bylaw violations came into effect July so that enforcement of bear attractant violations commences in summer 2009.

Lions Bay has developed a great bear signage system over the years. There are permanent bear safety information signs posted at trailheads, seasonal aluminum signs posted during bear season notifying residents of bear activity and how to reduce attractants, and temporary bear warning signs with bear safety and contact information that are posted for a week when bears access garbage or structures.