

By Norma Rodgers, Chair of Lions Bay Bear Smart Committee

The Lions Bay Bear Smart Committee has been very active this spring educating residents about ways to live safely with bears. Black bears wander into neighbourhoods from the forests surrounding our homes, and only stay to cause trouble if they find food.

The Lions Bay Bear Smart Committee has met six times in 2008, and set many goals to educate residents and increase the safety of our neighbourhoods. The Committee arranged for bear shaped fridge magnets to be sent to each resident with the 2008 tax notices, paid with Bear Smart funds from the provincial government. The bear report phone number indicated on the bear magnet (1-877-952-7277) is directed to a 24/7 human voice, that will take information for tracking bear activity or transfer immediately to the Conservation Officer Service if there is an emergency situation. Response is based on the level of human-bear conflict. Lions Bay's Conservation Officer Chris Doyle, who is also a member of the Bear Smart Committee, stated when asked about COS response to a tagged bear, *"if the conflict escalates we would attempt to live trap it, determine its conflict history and deal with it non-lethally if possible. Destruction might be considered if it is in poor health, is breaking into houses or is unusually aggressive."* Since there is a cooperative relationship, the COS shares bear report information with the Village to inform residents about local bear hazards.

Several events have promoted bear messages this spring. On April 16th the Bear Smart Committee sponsored a 'Living with Bears in Lions Bay' information evening in the Village Hall. Residents arrived to find the walls decorated with Bear Aware posters created by Lions Bay students, and several informative displays from the North Shore Black Bear Society, Lions Bay Bear Smart, and Rollins bear resistant garbage bins.

The 'Living with Bears' program began with Sylvia Dolson, Executive Director of the Get Bear Smart Society based in Whistler, B.C. She gave an excellent power point presentation, including video clips of many bears interacting with Whistler residents and breaking into structures. Sylvia's message included an emphasis on removing unnatural bear food attractants like accessible garbage, outside fridges, freezers or diaper containers, accessible bird feeders, and fruit rotting in trees or compost. The next presentation by Chris Doyle (area Conservation Officer), provided bear statistics and information about response procedures. Linda Heneault (Councillor), Event Moderator and Bear Smart Committee member, then outlined some of the steps Lions Bay has undertaken to become designated Bear Smart. Then Norma Rodgers, Chair of the Bear Smart Committee, provided answers to the Bear Smart Quiz. In conclusion, Anne Page, Administrative Assistant and Committee member, awarded prize bear photos by Bill and Serena Keay and a teddy bear to Bear Quiz participants randomly picked.

The next month on May 10th, the Committee provided a bear information booth at the Lions Bay Garden Show. At this booth were teddy bears and bear print tattoo prizes, an interactive bear knowledge quiz, bear friendly compost brochures, bear information handouts, and a bear safety video loop playing for ongoing interest. Committee members Anne Page and Birgitta von Krosigk (Councillor), shared the booth with Christine Miller, Education Coordinator of the North Shore Black Bear Society. The bear booth was very popular with gardeners who wanted to know how to live amicably with bears, and Christine was especially popular with the children.

On May 23rd, Christine Miller (sponsored by the Bear Smart Committee) returned to Lions Bay to give her youth oriented power point presentation to our Community School. The students related to her emphasis on local bear information, keeping bears wild and staying safe in bear country. They were eager to share their considerable bear knowledge with Christine during her interactive presentation, but also learned new information about bears and attractants. The Bear Smart Committee gave a teddy bear to the school, and bear paw tattoos to students.

May 23rd was also the deadline for Bear Smart Grant applications and Lions Bay has sent in another request for funding the local bear education program. Plans include large bear information trail head signs and continued bear education programs for residents and schools.

The Bear Smart Committee invites interested residents to volunteer for bears in Lions Bay. Please contact Anne Page at the village office or Norma Rodgers at 921-8467.