Kenai Russian River Collaborative Public Process (2011)

Compilation of Public Comments
(Written, Email, Phone)

From: rushnriverhooker@hotmail.com
Subject: RE: REMINDER -- Kenai-Russian River Public Forums -- April 18-21
Date: April 20, 2011 10:29:49 AM GMT-08:00
To: janc@gci.net

Hello Jan! I was unable to fill out your "yellow" sheet "I want to highlight" card due I had to leave at 9PM last night (April 19th 2011) in Soldotna.

So if I may here it is on line.

1. Close the Russian River to fishing and the fisherman trail from the falls to the confluences on a regular basis for a particular continuous time and dates (11PM to 6AM for June 12-July 15th as an example) to reduce human-bear encounters. Other benefits in addition to safety issues reference bear activities would help reduce illegal fishing practices and other activities like vandalism to fences, signs and boardwalk abuses like graffiti.

2. Continue to increase law enforcement presents on the Russian River especially on weekends and holidays during the high activity summer season and as an addition to item #1 above also have some late nightly spot checks of Russian River activities to enforce the closure, if implemented, and illegal activities that do occur reference fishing and property abuses. (I know I have seen the results of these late night negative activities both as a user and a volunteer.....I am going into my 45th year of visiting and enjoying the recreational activities of the area in addition to the salmon fishing as a non-commercial user).

3. Make the punishment of illegal activities on the Russian River area painful to the offender. Raise the minimum fines allowable by law so it hurts financially to be caught and prosecuted, especially where it effects the bear-human safety issues such as unattended attractants.

John Bernard
Soldotna, AK 99669
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1. Education - Web based videos and on-site orientations for all visitors on regulations regarding personal belongings (coolers, backpacks), proper handling and disposal of fish waste and proper etiquette/techniques for handling bear encounters.

2. Nighttime closure - from 11pm to 7am (area of closure needs to be determined). This is action has two benefits, it will reduce "snagging" and the taking of "kings" which are both prohibited and it will allow the bears time to feed without human disturbance. One caveat with this action is consistency of the closure, which is key when dealing with bears. The bears will quickly figure out when the people are off the river, so changing those closure boundaries, days or times could have an adverse effect on reducing human - bear conflicts.

3. Funding - A $10.00 Sockeye stamp for the Kenai River. Ricky Gease mentioned this during the meeting and it is important that there is a ongoing source of funding for education, maintenance, improvements, additional personnel (law enforcement on weekends), etc.

4. Improving trails and clearing brush to create better "lines of sight". This way bears can see the people coming and are not surprised and vice versa.

Let me know if you have any questions about what I wrote and I hope the rest of the meetings are as productive as last nights.

Regards,

Dave

Dave Bachrach
AK Adventures
PO Box 2828
Homer, AK 99603
Phone: 907.235.1805
Fax: 907.235.1886
www.goseebears.com

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Streamwatch volunteer for the past ten years. Bear conflicts will always be a problem. Constructive solutions that I think have worked really well include employing people to wade down the river dislodging carcases and to increase patrols by fish and game officers to investigate people shooting guns improperly, etc. It really bothers me when dumb fishermen shoot bears for no good reason. Extra patrols with fish and game officers also help enforce the backpack rule. A few tickets on busy days are a good deterrent to people leaving backpacks behind for the entire season.

What I feel has been less successful is the removal of cleaning stations along the river. Salmon are very heavy, and most people are not going to carry their fish all the way to the mouth to clean them. I feel removing the cleaning stations has just lead to people cleaning their fish on the riverbanks or up in the campground. There was lots of evidence of people cleaning their fish in improper places the first year the cleaning stations were removed, but this past year I think it got better, and there was less evidence of people leaving fish carcasses in bushes and the like.

I also really liked the cute rhyming signs along the ramps down to the river that said little phrases about keeping your backpack near you and the like. I assume the signs went down after a season due to too much vandalism, but I did like them and they educated casual anglers who probably don't know about the three foot backpack rule.

Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,
Heather Benz

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Phil Bray
Cooper Landing

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bears, and respect their right to be there. It's a sign of a healthy salmon run.

- This area attracts folks from all over the world, and there is no requirement for them to have an IQ above what the bears have…….let the laws of nature rule this area (with a small amount of education and enforcement of existing laws/rules)
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Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Regards,

W.C. Casey
Seward Resident and frequent user of Russian/Kenai River area

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Another proposal will be to limit the time that people can fish. I love to fish early in the morning. It is a beautiful time of day, it is quiet, and I see more wildlife, including bears, than most people. I would hate to see such restrictions put in place.

Did hiring the young men with pitchforks to push the carcasses downstream to the Kenai reduce bear numbers?

And again, do we want to reduce bear numbers? Many people go not to fish but to see wildlife, especially bears.

How many "Bear Encounters" as you defined them do we have on average? By your definition I've never had one. I have stopped fishing and gotten out of the river to let a bear pass, and once that meant going to the far side over rapids and rocks, but I wasn't in terrible danger and the bears have never even bluff charged me, much less attacked.

Clearly, educating the public on how to behave around bears is appropriate. I have seen people drop their stringers and run when the bear was 50 yards upriver on the other side! I have also had idiots throw rocks at bears that were minding their own business and scare the bear at ME.

I wish I could attend the public forum, but I'll be out of town that week.

Larry Benz

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From: gobearviewing@hotmail.com
Subject: RE: REMINDER - Kenai-Russian River Public Forums - April 18-21
Date: May 29, 2011 8:27:35 AM GMT-08:00
To: janc@gci.net

Hello Jan,
Prior to the public meetings, I sent you a copy of the management ideas I put together for the Russian River area on behalf of Alaska Recreational Management. Has that been included in the public comments? If not, please do so. I will resend if necessary.
Steve Stringham

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From: excel.construct@acsalaska.net
Subject: Kenai-Russian River Comment
Date: August 10, 2011 3:37:13 PM GMT-08:00
To: comments-alaska-chugach-seward@fs.fed.us
Cc: flipped53144@yahoo.com, janc@gci.net

I have been a regular user of the Kenai-Russian River area for 40 years and have a few simple suggestions for the Russian River trail system and the viewing platform at the falls.

Distances on the signage would be very helpful, as well as mileposts along the way. Especially on the trail to the falls, where many hikers are visitors who are not familiar with the trail, distance markers will help people determine how far they have come and how far they have to go. Some may decide it's too much and turn back. Others will be able to estimate how long it will take to make the round trip after the first mile. I cannot tell you how many people have asked me "how much farther to the falls" as I pass them on the way out.

At the viewing platform the foliage has become overgrown to the point that it blocks much of the view. When it was first built there was a mostly unobstructed view. A little pruning would make a big difference.

Finally, a little fill could be used at the entrance to the platform. There is a large puddle that forms there in our recently very rainy summers.

Thank you for considering these suggestions.

Mike Gould
(907) 522-5554 work
(907) 244-3347 cell

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- Need to answer question of whether there are more bears in this area
- He spoke with a woman who owns cabin on the Cooper Landing end of Upper Russian Lake. Pilot planning to drop her off counted 35 brown bears up there. For years in the past, they never saw a brown bear, just black.
- In his early years in Cooper Landing (moved there in 1996), Ron never saw brown bears. What has changed?
- Upper Russian boars are pushing sows and cubs out of there, down toward confluence.
- ADF&G has sampled bear hair and DNA, but no sampling on the Upper Russian.
- Need baseline on bear population – to be able to make future management decisions and get proof of whether actions work.
- Need to open up hunting season / shoot some old boars?

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fertilizer or other product.) After seeing the volume of naturally spawned out fish laying dead on the river banks, removal of waste from the ecosystem does not appear to be detrimental to the nutrient cycle.

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– I have a tendancy to think a night time closure is appropriate but after seeing the numbers of users on the river at night, I'm not sure that closing the river would make a huge difference. There just aren't that many people using the river. At the same time, if roughly 100 people are using the river from 10pm to 7am, after one week, that closure would affect 700 people and that's a large volume of users. Perhaps it is worth further research.

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– Thank you for reading my comments and providing this opportunity to the public. Hopefully, this comment period will be beneficial.

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– Remy McBride
– (907)362-1479
– Stream Watch Coordinator

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– Keith Gerke
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From: Yuri Lvov [mailto:uniangler@att.net]
Sent: Wednesday, October 19, 2011 1:34 PM
To: FS-comments-alaska-chugach-seward
Subject: Russian River problem

Dear Friends,

Together with a large number of friends, who fly fish in Alaska every year, I would like to bring to your attention, that we all believe that **the Russian river must be completely closed to all fishing,** and those, who want to hike to the Lakes or use the trails along the Russian river, should be allowed to do this in large enough groups and **must be accompanied by a state ranger** to avoid encounters with the bear population.

We are sure, that you all know, that the Russian river has been a paradise for poachers from all over US for years now -- they violate fishing rules and regulations and **harvest everything they catch** -- it is a common knowledge. Some of them spend up to 4 months in Cooper Landing RV and camp grounds poaching every day.
In the past several years huge herds of poachers from Germany have joined them on the Russian river -- these ones fish without licenses (they know, that no one ever checks licenses, in fact no one ever checks anything or anybody on the Russian river !). Like the US poachers, the German ones violate all regulations and indiscriminately harvest everything they catch.
Moreover, thousands of people mercilessly wade the tiny Russian river all summer long destroying spawning grounds and killing millions of salmon eggs every day.

Russian river is a real national treasure, you know it better than anyone else, so **close the Russian river for good,** and you will resolve not only the problem with bears, who are in their right to live there, -- you will resolve many other ugly problems as well.
With kind regards to all of you,

Yuri Lvov, President
The Universal Angler

From: Ryan.Bowdish@ch2m.com
Subject: "Kenai-Russian River Comment"
Date: October 31, 2011 2:25:03 PM GMT-08:00
To: janc@gci.net

This is not intended to be directly at you, as well as in no specific order relating to the Discussion Guide.

I completely disagree with trying to regulate the Bears interactions with Humans. Sure, posing safety measures and educating people is the best way to go about it. It should be the other way around, continue to educate people and not threaten the Bears existence. Why are animals extinct all over the world? Because humans find it necessary to regulate animals involvement in their lives. WE invaded their territory, not the other way around. You can't threaten and punish an animal for trying to survive as their habitat is slowly destroyed by humans. I'm not some green activist against hunting and fishing etc, just tired of humans blaming animals for deaths and continually trying to regulate how wild animals should live and survive. I disagree with limiting bears access to the river with the use of electric fences etc. Do you hate having to take a detour? Me too.

Lengthening the hunting season or raising the limit on bears on the KP would only create another problem, a rise in population of moose and other animals that bears eat. Then we'd pose a longer/higher bag limit on moose. It's an on-going cycle that "we" as a people try and regulate and fail miserably at.

The power point presentation further proves the lack of education people have regarding their ideas and thoughts on bear behavior. There are numerous slides with people standing taking pictures, essentially trapping the animal on an island, our surrounding it, not realizing what this effect has on the animal. I can guess the climb on bear deaths (non DLP) is a direct result of a lack in education of gun safety or knowledge in general.

I've had numerous encounters on the Kenai, from the falls down to Bing's Landing, if more people would just move on and give the animals the right of way I think it would reduce a lot of conflict. You also need an "escape route", it'd been engraved in our minds since childhood to have an escape route from potentially dangerous situations, fires, earthquakes, etc.

Thank you for your time

From: Verna Adams [mailto:vadams@BBNC.NET]
Sent: Friday, October 28, 2011 10:20 AM
To: FS-comments-alaska-chugach-seward
Subject: Human-Bear Conflicts on Kenai

Seems only logical that the bears are the ones who need protection from HUMAN encroachment, not the other way around. Why not just close both rivers when the bears are feeding? They were there first! Besides most of those fishing the Kenai are "Sporties" and probably don't even eat fish! Thanks for letting me get my two-cents in.

From: Jack Toby [mailto:mckimmey907@hotmail.com]
Sent: Friday, October 28, 2011 11:33 AM
To: FS-comments-alaska-chugach-seward
Subject: Russian River Bears

I have lived in Alaska since 1978. We quit fishing at the Russian River in 2005.

When Fish and Game artificially enhanced the Salmon Run to quadruple the return; they lost control of the situation.

For all previous years the trend was for humans to fish in the daytime and bears fish at night. Occasional problem animals were managed by teams of two game wardens (one armed with a rifle and rubber bullets; the other with a shotgun). They ran interference for the bears and the fishermen: e.g. "Clear out,She's coming!"

All of that has been lost. The management technique now is to micro manage the humans to where it is no longer a pleasure to fish!

Dumping the responsibility for managing the Bears on locals ad tourists with big guns is completely irresponsible.

This is a world famous Salmon Stream. It is not good enough to say it is "Bear Country" and pretend this is Katmai.

John and Linda McKimmey

From: Childress, Miranda L [mailto:mlchildress@anthc.org]
Sent: Friday, October 28, 2011 11:46 AM
To: FS-comments-alaska-chugach-seward
Subject: Bear Mgmt on Kenai/Russian Comment

My husband and I take the whole fish home and discard the carcass in Anchorage. We also "call people out" if they aren't properly discarding their carcasses, sometimes it helps and sometimes it doesn't. In addition to a shot gun, we have a loud bell to alert any bears in the area that we are coming thru. I think better education to the public might help. Like PSA's on tv & radio, adds on the side of a bus and other places.

Miranda Childress
Certified Pharmacy Technician
ANMC OP-PHR, Mediset Program
(907)729-2199
mlchildress@anthc.org

From: dan bouwens [mailto:danbouwens@yahoo.com]
Sent: Friday, October 28, 2011 12:32 PM
To: FS-comments-alaska-chugach-seward
Subject: Bears at the Russian

I am a many generation Alaska native. I forefathers fished the Russian River thru the years and when challenged by the bears the threat was resolved. Bears are part of the natural culture and share the same resoures with mankind. Man is part of the natural culture of this land and has as much right to walk the land as does the Bears. Those that hold the bear to higher spot then Man don't have the same value to this land as I do. These bears have been reduced to begging pets that have no respect for themselves with no fear of man. Being raised in a tradional Native culture, with fish processing ongoing thru the summers, bears didn't make the mistake of entering into the area without knowing their survival was at great risk. I am not advocating killing all the bears in the area, but there has to be a balance to provide a safe area, and the remaining bears need to know that their own saftey is at risk. These are smart creatures. Open a hunting season in the area and leave it open until the bear popluation on the entire pensulua is reduced. The moose counts are down due to the high number of bears and wolves. Fish and Game knows this, but is unwilling to make it known to the public. Thank you Dan Bouwens 907-748-4551 Also limit the number of guides on the entire river, their lobby efforts are only to fund their own needs. CIRI should step in and reclaim their own Native lands in this area and resolve these issues.

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I also think that hauling fish waste to the landfill is disappointing and should not be considered. We don't need to add more to our waste stream My favorite idea is onsite grinding and disposal into the river. We need more fillet stations across the russian river like there used to be, at the least one at each staircase. What's wrong with hand-crank grinders at each station?

I also like the hired workers manually loosening up carcasses. I wrote this up in my initial response as a strategy that really worked well. I can understand it's not the perfect long-term solution, however.

Nighttime Closure:
I do not see this as necessary. I think many anglers dislike feeling excessive rules and regulations and I don't really know how many night-time problems with bears there really are. Maybe just put up better signage, such as reflective signs at the bottom of each staircase that warn about nighttime bear safety. By being reflective the signs will be immediately noticeable when hit by the light of a flashlight or headlamp, which might be necessary in the darkest of night when people are going out (then again maybe it never gets dark enough for flashlights...)

Spatial Closures:
I agree that closing discreet areas as needed is appropriate. There needs to be lots of signage marking the closed areas and good levels of enforcement, which I have seen more of in recent years. Last year I was on the river when the woods below the ferry were closed due to bears, and there were people fishing on the bank there with their packs a distance aways...I'm not sure if people didn't know about the closure or didn't care. I also agree that Cottonwood corner is a prime area for a) people leaving their packs too far and b) for bears to access the river. I myself have had many bear encounters at this spot.

Bear Management:
Try to leave the bears alone! Smart anglers know this, but others don't. I think we do need some strong messages discouraging firearms. Last season we bumped into a baby bear right below the Grayling stairs. A group of anglers coming down the stairs met us and immediately pulled their pistols. It was a baby bear! We encouraged them to be prudent about waving around their gun, but too often bears are unnecessarily shot by people who don't know proper bear safety. Maybe provide suggestions of gun alternatives and some stats about bears unnecessarily killed or something. Basically it really pisses me off when people bother the bears and don't exercise proper respect and caution. Enforcing strict fines on people who discharge firearms would be nice.

IDEA: Have a hotline number for tips, and have the number prominently displayed across the river. People can call in snaggers, those who are abandoning their packs, or people who discharge firearms or behave improperly towards bears. You don't have to follow up on all (or even many) of the calls, but having people checkin in on each other could help add a threat of enforcement. I know on Streamwatch we whip out cameras and pretend to make reports on the walkie-talkie to hopefully intimidate people who are acting improperly.

Citizen participation could help in this effort, but maybe it will also lead to unnecessary conflict between anglers.

Education:
-Scheduled river walks is a great idea! Lots of people are on the river as more tourists than anglers (or spouses/relatives who anglers who just walk along the river and don't fish)
-Interagency signs: I like all of the interpretive signs along the river and would be happy to see more!
-You should improve the "fish on" radio station. It's really awful.
-I don't know how much a comprehensive website will be useful, but you could provide a sign-up sheet for visitors to receive a river information newsletter. This could come up weekly during prime season and provide a fishing report (incentive for anglers to sign up) and updates about bear sightings and other safety/educational tips.
-I thought the one-stop guide was awesome and interesting. The hard part is getting the attention of anglers who just don't care about anyone but themselves and think they own the river (these are the guys who litter their beer bottles and snag fish because they think it's their right) and I think the only way to educate them is more tickets from Fish and Game officers. (Unfortunately).

Regulations:
I agree that anglers do not like to feel over-regulated, and we should educate more than regulate. That said, enforce any existing regulations heavily so they are actually followed. I think the stringer and backpack rules don't need to be enforced super strictly (like give them more than three feet leeway, but more that abandoned or very lone backpacks/fish need to be confiscated and ticketed. I'm especially concerned about anglers who snag all over the place and think it's okay. I don't really care for any of the suggested additional regulations.

Enforcement:
As stated above, I really like more enforcement. This has been improving over recent years.

Infrastructure and Facility Management:
I don't think much heavy duty improvement is needed (such as centralized cooking.cleaning facilities). The individual food storage bins at each campsite along the Russian were a good improvement. I do like trimming some vegetation, specifically right at the bottom of some of the staircases where there are some sharp blind turns. Frankly I haven't had that many bear problems in the campsite. Many years ago a bear and cubs walked through my site in the evening, which was scary, but normally they're more of a problem down by the river.

OTHER NEEDS: This isn't bear related, but along the Kenai there's a huge problem with people using the woods as a toilet. It's gross and is a massive pollutant, not to mention the toxins that can enter the river from fecal runoff. Yosemite uses composting toilets, I think we should consider some of those here, just on the kenai. On the russian we're close enough to the campground anywhere along the river that it's not such a bad problem.

Trails: No comment. I don't fish on the Kenai if I can help it.

Thank you for your time!
Sincerely,
Heather Benz

From: Robert/Susan White [mailto:rdw1@gci.net] **Sent:** Tuesday, November 01, 2011 10:38 AM **To:** FS-comments-alaska-chugach-seward **Subject:** brown bear kenai russian river

the human bear conflicts will only get worse with the current wildlife management that is in place. brown bear numbers have grown to the point that they have no place to go, the typical brown bear that frequent this area are sows with cubs and younger bears driven there by larger boars and sows that they can not compete with for territory.. hunter harvest would solve most of this problem. just the removal of a few large boars would make it safer for these bears to dwell where they would like to away from people. robert white
seward ak ph 9073621453

From: steve vanek [mailto:smlvanek@gmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, November 01, 2011 3:15 PM
To: FS-comments-alaska-chugach-seward
Subject: Russian river bears

There are just to many bears but managers are not willing to admit that. The best thing would be to remove 25 or 30 bears out of there.
Tranquilize them and take them into the interior or just kill them.
You will never be able to educate people. You could educate the bears by shooting everyone that comes to the River. They will quickly get the message. As far as getting the message is concerned, the bears learn the message much faster than the outside huggers or the managers.

Steve Vanek

From: Peter & Bernadine Raiskums [mailto:berna@gci.net]
Sent: Tuesday, November 01, 2011 8:32 PM
To: FS-comments-alaska-chugach-seward
Subject: Human - Bear Conflicts

As background, my wife and I have volunteered with the Stream Watch program at the Russian River for 10 years. It is our opinion that bear problems and vandalism could be minimized if the river was closed from midnight to 5 AM. It is easier to stumble on to a

bear in the dark and there are significantly fewer fishermen on the river at night.

We also would like to see a ban on firearms in the campground and the river. A fisherman with a gun seems to be less motivated to give bears their space than one who is unarmed. We have also seen fishermen shooting at bears to scare them away without any regard to who else they may hit or that they may injure a bear creating a serious problem for everyone.

Finally, the decision to require fishermen to clean fish only at the confluence or take the fish out whole has not always worked. Fishermen fishing above the power line are normally not going to go to the confluence to clean their fish. We have observed some fishermen cleaning and fileting their fish on the river bank and throwing whole carcasses in the river. It seems that fishermen should still be given the option to clean and filet on the river bank but required to chop up the carcasses in that case.

We have seen many bears on the river during all times of the day. The bears are more interested in finding fish than attacking people, unless they have been harassed or confronted by the people. We have not personally observed significant problems initiated by the bears on the Russian River.

Peter and Bernadine Raiskums

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From: Bill Tappan [mailto:tappassoc@acsalaska.net]
Sent: Wednesday, November 02, 2011 8:47 AM
To: FS-comments-alaska-chugach-seward
Subject: Kenai-Russian River Comment

Hi Jan,
In a nutshell, here are my personal comments. I am not representing the Kenai-Soldotna AC with these comments.

- Keep all MDNs in the Russian River; birds, trout, Dollies and bears need them. Attempting to relocate the bears is not desirable on many levels,
- Enforce a chop 'n flop carcass disposal program or haul out of whole fish; people need to be held responsible,
- No temporal and spatial closures on the Russian River; this is just not right.

Thanks, Jan.
Bill

William H. (Bill) Tappan, Chair
Alaska Department of Fish & Game
Kenai-Soldotna Advisory Committee
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KENAI

Barbara Anderson
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ınai-Russian River Collaborative Public Process

ing Together to Reduce Human-Bear Conflicts

October 2011 Public Forums – Public Comment Worksheet

Please use this form to share your comments on key questions for each topic area, or to make any other comments. **You can leave the completed form here tonight or mail it by Monday, November 7**, to: Jan Caulfield at 114 S. Franklin St., Ste. 203, Juneau, AK 99801. You are also welcome to email comments to: comments-alaska-chugach-seward@fs.fed.us (Please put "Kenai-Russian River Comment" in the email's subject line)

Fish Waste Management

- Which fish waste management options do you think would be the most effective on the Kenai and/or Russian River?
- Would you be willing to pay for these types of fish waste management services? If so, how much is reasonable to expect an angler to pay?

The only fish waste management option I would be in favor of is a mechanical grinder at the ferry location. I would NOT be happy to see carcasses REMOVED from the system. As far as paying for it, I wouldn't.

Temporal (Nighttime) Closures

- What is your reaction to a possible a nighttime closure to all access at the KRRC as a means to reduce the potential for human-bear conflicts?
- If you support the idea of a nighttime closure, what dates and hours would you suggest? Which locations should be subject to a closure?

I support night time closures on the Russian River during the red salmon runs, midnight to 4AM.

Spatial Closures

- What is your reaction to continuing to close discrete area to public access in-season, as necessary to reduce human-bear conflicts? Are there particular area(s) you suggest be considered for closure(s)?

On an "as needed" basis, I think spatial closures could be an effective tool BUT not a system wide closure.

Bear Management

- Do you have any comments to offer regarding how bears are managed at KRRC?

I believe it is the people who are the problem, not the bears. SO it's the people who need to be managed.

Education

- Which are the "top three" public education approaches / tools you think should be emphasized at the Kenai-Russian River area?

I like the brochure that was given to campers and bear users. I also feel the personal touch by Stream Watch is a great approach to helping resolve many issues. Since I think "bear viewing" is on the increase, a video approach to letting people know what is going on is a good idea ... BUT NOT REQUIRED!

Regulations / Enforcement

- Do you have any comments to offer regarding regulations intended to reduce human-bear conflicts, or the enforcement of those regulations?

I am a firm believer that if you don't make violators hurt in their "pocketbook", they won't change their behavior SO WRITE THE TICKETS!

Infrastructure

- Are there infrastructure needs / ideas related to minimizing human-bear conflicts you would like to suggest for consideration? (Ferry parking lot area? On the river corridor?)

Not really.

Trails & Visibility

- Did you notice any difference in visibility and your sense of being able to see and avoid bears after vegetation clearing was done in 2011? Are there additional areas where vegetation needs to be thinned to improve visibility?

This was a great improvement to the White Trail/Canyon! I felt safer and could see a lot more while hiking and fishing. There was an area just below the falls that could use a bit more thinning of vegetation. THANKS, Henry Anderson

ANCH

public comment

The Kenai-Russian River Collaborative Public Process

Working Together to Reduce Human-Bear Conflicts

October 2011 Public Forums – Public Comment Worksheet

Please use this form to share your comments on key questions for each topic area, or to make any other comments. **You can leave the completed form here tonight or mail it by Monday, November 7**, to: Jan Caulfield at 114 S. Franklin St., Ste. 203, Juneau, AK 99801. You are also welcome to email comments to: comments-alaska-chugach-seward@fs.fed.us (Please put "Kenai-Russian River Comment" in the email's subject line)

Fish Waste Management

- Which fish waste management options do you think would be the most effective on the Kenai and/or Russian River? GRINDER/ RECYCLING CENTER
- Would you be willing to pay for these types of fish waste management services? If so, how much is reasonable to expect an angler to pay?

Add Fee to Parking/Access
- Give Rebate (tokens?) for use of grinder etc.
- Have expert fillet-er ($1/fish?)
Advertise: Keep more of your ($15"/lb) Fresh Red Salmon

Temporal (Nighttime) Closures

- What is your reaction to a possible a nighttime closure to all access at the KRRC as a means to reduce the potential for human-bear conflicts? NEGATIVE
- If you support the idea of a nighttime closure, what dates and hours would you suggest? Which locations should be subject to a closure?

- the SANCTUARY: CLOSE on ALTERNATE DAYS
- hits the worst snaggers / multiple limit takers etc
- "Keep out the Riffraff"

Spatial Closures

- What is your reaction to continuing to close discrete area to public access in-season, as necessary to reduce human-bear conflicts? Are there particular area(s) you suggest be considered for closure(s)?

Close AREA around "GRINDER" / Recycler
- Let the Bears have it to themselves
- Electric Fencing to "FUNNEL" Bears to area/AWAY from fishermen.

Bear Management

- Do you have any comments to offer regarding how bears are managed at KRRC?

Encourage USE of Aversive conditioners
eg "Bear Spray" if they are non-lethal
and effective. (Tasers?)

Education

- Which are the "top three" public education approaches / tools you think should be emphasized at the Kenai-Russian River area?

Require on-line "Bear School" (or in-person)
↳ Kiosk?
- give authentication code for completion
- MUST PRESENT CODE for entry to area
- Needs lead time and PR Push

Regulations / Enforcement

- Do you have any comments to offer regarding regulations intended to reduce human-bear conflicts, or the enforcement of those regulations?

Condition the BEARS: (TASER RENTAL?)
temporary electric fencing where bears
approach people ("Hot Spots")

Infrastructure

- Are there infrastructure needs / ideas related to minimizing human-bear conflicts you would like to suggest for consideration? (Ferry parking lot area? On the river corridor?)

Have "BEAR SPRAY" Dispensing Machines at
↳ Ferry + Campgrounds (like soda machines)
MORE PARKING (farther out) with a SHUTTLE BUS
- Prevents Early Birds from Hogging the River ALL WEEKEND
↳ Lucky in work schedule should not mean ability to HOG the parking lots + Campgrounds.

Trails & Visibility

- Did you notice any difference in visibility and your sense of being able to see and avoid bears after vegetation clearing was done in 2011? Are there additional areas where vegetation needs to be thinned to improve visibility?

Yes - I noticed = and Appreciated

Cell Tower - Recruit Ethical Fishermen
to Film + text/email violations

From: Bill Petrik [mailto:pet1-kish@gci.net]
Sent: Sunday, November 06, 2011 9:53 AM
To: FS-comments-alaska-chugach-seward
Subject: Kenai-Russian River Comment

I have been fishing the actual Russian River since 1980. Bears are part of the circle of life there. I can say that I have been adhering to the latest policies along the river. It has not been easy but I do it. I take my fish to the mouth and clean them there. I am in the minority. It makes sense to me. Reduce the food source and you reduce the bears. You don't leave your fish unattended and there is a reduction of bears snatching your catch. I noticed that when there was enforcement that the rules were adhered to more often. When there is little enforcement, there are fewer adherences to the rules. If you want people to follow the rules there must be enforcement. The campground entrance gives out pamphlets on guidelines for fishing and bear safety. That is a good idea. However, how many people actually read the pamphlet? Education is a first step but there still needs to be enforcement. Without enforcement the rules are often violated as there is no incentive to follow them. It is similar to traffic violations. If there are no police with radar guns writing tickets on the highways, the sky tends to be the limit on how fast people go.

I also think that there should be some type of recommendation on snagging fish. I rarely do the drag and snap technique for red fishing and thus rarely snag fish. I observe folks using this technique a lot and most of the time they are snagging the fish somewhere other than the mouth. This causes "snaggers" to disrupt the whole flow of the fishing hole and keep them there longer before they get their fish legally in the mouth. Unfortunately, there is not much one can do to about this other than possibly educate people that there is a better technique to get their fish legally and quicker than dragging and snapping.

This River is one of the classic places in the world for access, fish, and scenery, and steps need to be taken to continue to provide this to people for generations to come. I am amenable to whatever restrictions are needed to do that. The stream back erosion program was a great step in that direction and I laud the forest service and the volunteers for this work. I look forward to more of such work to mitigate the damage of the throngs.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the river.

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WildWatch

Research, Consulting, Educational Services & Adventure Tours

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gobearviewing@hotmail.com

"Making good conservation good business"

4 November 2011

To: USFWS, USFS, ADF&G

Re: RUSSIAN RIVER BEAR MANAGEMENT PLANNING – Public review meeting 25 Oct. 2011

Dear Colleagues:

I appreciate the opportunity you have provided for public input on this complicated issue. To the extent that verbal input can be captured as bullet points, you have done a superb job in summarizing a wide diversity of opinions and special knowledge from the public.

However, a written record of detailed comments should prove helpful for sharing insights of a more technical nature. As you are aware, I have spent decades studying bear behavior with particular attention to ursine body language, bear viewing, direct bear-human interactions (e.g., habituation), and impacts by abrupt declines in major food supplies. These years of research have led to a number of unusual conclusions and hypotheses that could be easily dismissed because they differ from conventional wisdom. However, the whole point of research is to test the veracity of prevailing wisdom and find where that wisdom fails to match reality. When such failures are discovered, and then used to reformulate our understanding of wildlife, this should facilitate management. I have also had occasion to address liability issues related to management of potentially dangerous wildlife. I hope that this background will facilitate your task of managing Russian River bears.

Note, although I sometimes advise Alaska Recreational Management on bear issues, the following comments are made independently of ARM and have not yet been reviewed by ARM. No assumption should be made about whether ARM agrees or disagrees on any point until that is stated by ARM CEO Bruce McCurtain or by its General Manager Dianne Owen.

How Are Russian River Bears Likely to Respond to Sudden Dearth of Salmon Carcasses?

I realize that you have reviewed some of the literature on responses to abrupt loss of major food sources; but I do not know which sources. So I will take the liberty of reviewing the most insightful sources of which I am aware. This information is addressed more fully in journal papers I published on the subject – copies of which I will provide electronically as attachments.

Note: RR = Russian River, LRR = Lower Russian River, KP = Kenai Peninsula. Unless otherwise stated, "carcass" refers to remains of a dead salmon left by a human.

1. **<u>Natural Famines</u>:**

a. Berry Crop Failures: During the early 1970's, when I was a grad student at UAF, my colleague David Hatler documented extensive depredations by interior bears when the berry crop failed. Much the same thing was later documented in Montana by Charles Jonkel (1971) and in Minnesota by Lynn Rogers (1983). There are numerous more recent cases.

Berry crop failures are commonly due to prolonged cold weather during spring and/or to cold summers with heavy overcast or to droughts.

What is known about how supplies of berries and other vegetative foods on the Kenai Peninsula have mediated effects of past management actions on bears visiting the LRR? How might the response by bears to loss of salmon carcasses be mediated by crops of plant foods during 2012?

b. **Salmon Run Failures:** have likewise led to rashes of bear depredations in Alaska and British Columbia. For example, a few years ago, the city of Bella Coola was inundated with desperately hungry bears. Will that happen to Cooper Landing if carcasses are not available to bears?

2. **<u>Closure of Garbage Dumps</u>:**

a. ***Direct Effects*:** At sites across North America, closure of dumps where bears have fed has quickly led to a marked increase in bear depredations in nearby communities, campgrounds, etc. Most commonly, property is damaged by bears seeking food. Occasionally people have been injured or killed by bears usurping the people's food or defending food that has already been usurped. A particularly extreme case was closure of all dumps in Yellowstone National Park during the late 1960's and early 1970's. Although I cannot lay my hands on statistical data for these repercussions, I recall reading that they were severe – severe enough that the National Park Service killed an estimated 75% of the grizzlies in Yellowstone, helping to trigger passage of the Endangered Species Act, and quick listing of grizzlies south of Canada as a Threatened Species. Most of the Park's black bears were also killed. Making matters worse, loss of garbage reduced nutritional status of surviving bears, thereby markedly lowering reproductive rate. These events are documented by Stringham (1983, 1985, 1986, 1989, 1990a,b) and by Craighead et al. (1995).

Presumably, you have made plans to assure that nothing similar happens here lest Peninsula brown bears end up as another Threatened Species. You may recall that Listing was proposed several years ago when these bears were classified by the State as a Species of Special Concern.

b. ***Ripple Effects***: Depredating bears are usually thought to be the same bears which had fed at dumps; but that is not necessarily true. In one case that I personally investigated, with black bears in New York's Adirondack Park, most "dump bears" were large, high ranking males who excluded smaller bears from this rich food source. Despite their extreme habituation at the dump, most avoided all contact with humans outside the dump. When the dump was closed, none of these boars was known to have come into conflict with humans. All bears captured or killed in resulting plague of conflict situations were much smaller individuals who may have been displaced by the dump-fed boars once competition for wild foods increased.

Will comparable ripple effects occur if salmon carcasses are suddenly unavailable on the LRR?

c. ***Catching Live Salmon vs. Scavenging Carcasses on the Lower Russian River*:** Perhaps most bears on the LRR are as skilled at catching vigorous salmon as bears in more remote areas of Alaska. But, during the past 2 decades, I have not seen any live fish caught in the LRR except late run spawners that did little to evade capture. If that is typical of bears on the LRR, we must wonder whether they have simply been too lazy to catch live vigorous salmon, or whether they have never developed sufficient skill? Laziness can overcome by hunger in a matter of hours. But learning fishing skills takes most bears several years. If bears on the LRR lack these skills, will they simply look for food elsewhere when carcasses are unavailable? Or will they become more bold and sneaky to steal fish, or more aggressive at usurping them from people, or in defending those they have already usurped? If unskilled bears are eliminated, will they be replaced by bears with better fishing skills?

3. **<u>Mitigating Effects of Sudden Declines in Major Food Supplies</u>**

a. ***Natural Foods***: Dump closures have sometimes been timed to coincide with years when natural foods were abundant. If 2012 is a really good year for plant foods, this might cushion the impacts of denying bears access to first-run salmon carcasses.

b. ***Diversionary Feeding:*** It would likely be easier and more successful to lure bears away from the Russian River than to drive them away (much as it is easier to pull a string than to push one).

* *Yellowstone National Park*: When plans were laid for closure of the Yellowstone dumps, bear researchers John and Frank Craighead proposed transporting carcasses of deer, elk, bison, etc. (ones that died naturally or were killed by vehicles) to remote areas of the Park to draw grizzlies there. Diversionary feeding was intended to be a temporary expedient to help bears through the transition to a fully natural diet. It was not proposed as a long-term practice. Nevertheless, that proposal was turned down. The Park Service justified its decision with a claim that diversionary feeding was just another form of artificial "feeding," which was forbidden by Park Service policy and philosophy.

There was supposedly also concern about potential liability if any person ended up near a carcass claimed by bears. Although that concern was justified, subsequent investigation demonstrated that risk of human injury in the Park overall would have been far lower if the bears had been lured away from dump sites, the nearby campgrounds, and other developed areas. The only known method of luring bears away from a prime feeding site is by providing alternative feeding sites.

* *Minnesota:* Rogers (2011) just reported on a long-term study in Minnesota. He provided beef fat and other foods to bears in one study area, but none in a second "control" area. Depredations continued as usual in the control area, just as in rest of Minnesota. In the diversionary feeding area, depredations dropped markedly. None of the bears that fed at the station was involved in depredations.

* *California* and *Europe*: Diversionary feeding has also been highly successful in the Tahoe region of California and in at least one region of Europe.

• *Adaptive Management at the KP*: Even though government agencies have taken the diversionary feeding option off the official table, it might be resurrected as part of a contingency plan that would be triggered only during periods when other measures fail.

Closed Periods

A common assumption in this planning process is that closing part or all of the LRR, during part or all of the 24-hr cycle, would give bears a chance to catch live salmon in the closed areas and periods even during the first sockeye run – thereby reducing likelihood that those bears will fish near people during the day. Is that realistic?

1. Clock hours: If closure would be for specific hours, such as 11pm-6am, would this allow bears to obtain enough salmon that they would not fish during other hours of the day? Would this apply to all bears, or would some bears – perhaps subordinates or sows with infant cubs – fish during the day, when there is less competition from fellow bears?

2. Darkness:

a. ***Fishing Bears*:** We know that black bears in at least one area of British Columbia regularly catch salmon during hours of darkness. But what is known about how their efficiency is affected by light level? To what extent is fishing at night a skill that requires learning above and beyond what is required for daytime fishing. If our bears lack these skills, how long would it take them to master them?

b. ***Pragmatism:*** If "nighttime" means "darkness", then there would be only a brief closure during the first run, and perhaps only a few hour closure during second run, with a long closure only during Coho season. How much would that reduce danger to humans? Would anglers be at more risk staying at the river during these hours than hiking out at dusk and returning at dawn? The dusk time limit at the Falls would have to be much earlier than at the LRR if people are to have enough time to get back to their car or to camp before there is too little light to see bears from a "safe" distance.

Closed Areas

Proposals have been made to close various areas to anglers during at least part of the summer, especially during the first run of sockeye, in hopes that bears will use these areas instead of those where people fish.

This assumes that bears will catch live fish in the LRR just as they do in the URR and in other streams throughout Alaska. How quickly are bears likely to make the transition? Can they catch enough salmon in areas closed to anglers? Will closed areas "fill up" with bears, leaving any other bears in the area no option but to fish elsewhere or else when?

This tactic is most likely to work if the closed areas are those where bears can most readily catch salmon. We know that one such area is the Falls. What other areas might qualify. Where else on the LRR have bears been observed catching vigorous salmon? Are there any hotspots?

Liability

I am attaching a copy of my paper on this topic that is currently under review for publication in the Journal of Human-Wildlife Interactions. In it, I focus on the unrealistic expectation by litigation attorneys and courts about the extent to which wildlife managers can predict how individual animals will respond to management actions. Whereas managers have to operate from the wisdom of foresight, litigation attorneys operate with the 20:20 wisdom of hindsight.

Liability arises from sins of both omission and commission – from not taking precautions when they could be deemed necessary, and from taking precautions that backfire.

If denying bears access to carcasses leads to someone being mauled, I would expect that the responsible agencies would be sued, based on the claim that the agencies should have known that this abrupt loss of a major food source would make the bears much more aggressive towards humans and especially more competitive for fish or other edibles possessed by people.

If aggression does increase, how will the agencies cope? Will they simply kill all bears along the LRR, or at least all those that someone interprets as being "aggressive" – even if "aggression" is limited to signals of fear, stress or frustration?

Another option that might be kept as a contingency plan is diversionary feeding. As mentioned previously, I think that this would reduce risk for thousands of people on the LRR far more than it would increase risk in a feeding area. However, does litigation take into account how much risk is reduced for people in general, versus how much risk was increased for whoever has the bad luck to be mauled?

I'm not sure how best to deal with the legal side of this issue. But the technical challenge is solvable, if only by restricting visitor access to the feeding area.

Dealing With "Problem Bears"

1. Problem People, as we all recognize, create problem bears by modifying the animals' natural behavior. So much bear management occurs through people management, whether through education or regulation. Nevertheless, when direct management of bears is essential, there are few options. Relocating bears is too rarely successful to justify its costs. So managers usually rely on killing the animals. [In addition to all of the bears killed by managers in Yellowstone National Park, are the many killed in Glacier Waterton National Park, in some cases by dropping tranquilized bears from helicopters (according to a Canadian biologist who observed this).] Let's now address killing of bears on the KP.

2. **DLP and control killings:** After 8? brown bears were killed in the RR area a few years ago, perceived bear-human conflicts have supposedly declined. However, given the inability of many people to distinguish true conflicts from imagined conflicts, I am not sure how much behavior of bears in the area has actually changed. More needs to be learned about what is accomplished by removing bears that frequent the LRR. When they are replaced by other bears, do those other bears behave more acceptably? In what ways and for how long?

3. **Preemptive Killing**: Promoting sport hunting of bears in the Russian River area, at least during the spring, and perhaps during the summer, could supposedly eliminate some bears that would otherwise forage at the RR, including some who have foraged there in prior years.

Note: although ADF&G found hair from only 2 bears that foraged at the RR for more than 1 year, do we know what that finding means? Were there repeat visits that did not leave hair that was found? How many potential repeat visitors were killed by sport hunters or by vehicles or in DLPs? Has this been checked by getting hair samples from the dead bears?

At this time, do we really know how quickly other bears would fill any social vacuum left by killing of some bears preemptively in control actions or by sport hunters?

How would hunting bears near or on the RR affect whatever risk that survivors pose to people? How likely are bears to be just wounded? Are hunted bears likely to be more defensive when they encounter people? Recall that most brown/grizzly bear attacks are defensive.

4. ***Natural Bear Deterrents***: Although black and brown bears are not territorial around salmon streams, neither is use of good fishing areas a free-for-all. Dominant bears sometimes deter some subordinates – especially subadults – from using an area. Is there any evidence of this around the LRR? What might be done to mimic this to deter subadults – who are often the most likely class of bear to become nuisances?

5. ***Artificial Deterrents*** (e.g., hazing). Although these should not be the primary means of minimizing risk of dangerous bear-human encounters, are there situations where hazing should be used, perhaps with the assistance of pepper spray, screamers, gun shots or bear dogs?

How Far Will People Carry Whole Fish?

1. During combat fishing, will anglers stray far from their "spot" before they are through fishing for the day or are ready to try another fishing spot? How does this affect their willingness to carry whole fish to a processing table, grinder, or refuse container?

2. When the catch limit is increased from 3 to 6 salmon, what affect does this have?

3. What is the effect of location – for instance along the boardwalk on the LRR vs. areas where anglers must climb along a steep bank vs. the Falls which are roughly 2 miles from the parking area?

Food Conditioning and Habituation

What causes a bear's behavior to become unacceptable? Is it food conditioning, and if so is it conditioning to salmon carcasses or to groceries and garbage? Are the replacement bears less likely to feed on carcasses, whole fish on stringers or in coolers, or angler lunches; are they less likely to raid campsites?

Is habituation a corruptive influence, and if so, in what sense? As a general rule, habituation increases the likelihood or frequency of bear-human encounters. But whether this increases or decrease risk of an encounter leading to human injury depends on the kind of habituation. If "habituation" is taken to mean reducing fear of humans, then one should ask "Fear of what?"

Do we want to keep bears afraid of being bullied or killed by people – the kind of fear that makes it defensive, perhaps dangerously so?

Or do we want keep them afraid of retaliation if they dare to bully someone – the kind of fear that inhibits any tendency for offensive aggression?

Minimizing Risk of Defensive Aggression: Bears fearing offensive aggression by people = *distrust of people:* Bears that fear this are likely to be defensive. Defensiveness encompasses a spectrum of ursine tactics, which I have summarized below in order of increasing danger to humans.

a. Avoiding contact with people
b. Withdrawing when contact occurs
c. Signaling mild fear and/or stress: e.g., popping jaws, whoofing, or pant-huffing
d. Signaling strong fear and/or stress: e.g., slamming paws against the ground or a tree, moaning.
e. Signaling frustration: e.g., grumble-moaning, which most people interpret as a growl; intimidation charge that stops well short of the person (often mis-labeled as a bluff charge)
f. Signaling anger: e.g., roaring and charging to within a short distance of a person.
g. Assault: physical contact with either no injury, or relatively minor injury.
h. Attack: injury so severe that it maims the victim and/or is potentially fatal.

In general, the more that bears trust people, the less defensive they are, even during surprise close encounters or when the bear is guarding food.

Minimizing risk of offensive aggression: Bears fearing retaliation by any person they try to bully = *respect* for people

In general, the more that bears respect people, the less they dare bully people, even to the extent of offensively threatening people or daring to take food from people.

Minimizing both risks = Acclimation: Trust minimizes likelihood and severity of defensive aggression; respect minimizes likelihood and severity of offensive aggression. The safest bears are thus those that both trust and respect people. These bears are said to be "acclimated" to people.

Bears that frequented the LRR this summer seemed well acclimated. I neither saw nor heard reliable reports of any disrespect by these bears. Even reports of defensive threats were uncommon, despite numerous cases of people – usually anglers – throwing stones at bears, yelling at them, etc.

How is respect of people lost?:

a. ***Politeness isn't the cause***: Most bears initially have no interest in people that they trust. So when people treat them deferentially – e.g., moving out of the way to let a bear pass on a trail or in the RR – this does not make the bear disrespectful towards people. Nor is disrespect fostered when defensive threats towards people lead to the bear feeling safer; on the contrary, that kind of experience tends to reduce future defensiveness.

b. ***Timidity may be***: However, if people are overly timid when faced by an offensively aggressive bear – a bully bear – this can reward its bullying and make the bear more dangerous. Timidity is worst when it surrenders food to the bear.

Best Practices: On the LRR, I commonly see people over-reacting to approaching bears, either by becoming too aggressive toward the bear, or by becoming too timid. These problems might be alleviated if the public learned that the first key to safety in these situations is staying calm and grouping up with other people, while being polite to the bear.

Bear Viewing

1. **Economic Importance to the Kenai Peninsula:** According to information provided by ADF&G to the Wolverine Creek Management Committee (of which I have been a member since its inception in 2003), Wolverine Creek draws approximately 10,000 visits per year. According to the National Park Service, Brooks River in Katmai National Park draws similar numbers. The Katmai Coast draws a few thousand visitors, as do Silver Salmon, Chinitna Bay, Kodiak Island, and other sites in southcentral Alaska. Total visitation is conservatively estimated at 30,000 visitors per summer. Assuming an average of $450 per excursion, that totals to $13.5 million per year. Added to the direct cost of tours are food, lodging, gasoline, etc. which at least doubles total expenditures by people who come to southcentral Alaska to see bears. If one uses the common economic rule of thumb that each dollar spent in a community passes through at least 3 sets of hands before exiting the community (e.g., employees at restaurants, lodges, gas stations, etc. spend most of their salaries locally, which in turn employs other people), then the $27+ million spent by viewers contributes at least $75 million to the regional economy, of which the majority comes to the Kenai Peninsula. (The total for Alaska is probably well over $100 million per year). If more economical bear viewing opportunities exist on the KP, so people do not have to fly to a remote site, this could markedly increase the number of viewers flocking to the KP, and thereby boost the local economy. The RR is also a good place to view some other kinds of wildlife, including birds.

2. **Opportunistic Viewing**:

a. Although only a small fraction of anglers want to see bears, their families may get tired of watching the anglers fish and look for other interests. This past summer, I met numerous wives and kids eager to see bears.

b. Most of the men I encountered looking for bears were either dedicated photographers (with premium cameras and lenses) or tourists from outside Alaska, many from foreign countries. Bill Tappen, one of the anglers present at the Soldotna public forum, said that he had found the same thing while spending at least 4 days per week all season fishing the Russian

3. <u>Destination Viewing</u>: Lists and descriptions of North America's major destination viewing sites are provided in my book *Bear Viewing in Alaska* and on the website of the Bear Viewing Association: www.bear-viewing-in-alaska.info.

a. Hyder in southeast Alaska, and the Russian River, are the only 2 destinations in North America where people can drive to within easy walking distance of sites to see both brown and black bears even a few percent of the time. Indeed, the LRR is one of the handful of sites where people can drive to see brown bears with even moderate certainty. (As Ted Spraker pointed out, one can drive around the Refuge and see both species. However, in my own experience, the number of hours of driving required to see either species, much less both, is prohibitive for most viewers).

b. The historical difficulty of seeing bears within walking distance of a road is why local air taxi services can charge roughly $200/hr for bear viewing trips to remote sites like Wolverine Creek (averaging under 2.5 hrs of viewing per trip), Lake Clark National Park, and Katmai. As viewing opportunities on the KP become better known to entrepreneurs, we can expect increasing pressure from them for commercial viewing tours along the Russian and eventually in other parts of the Peninsula. If tour companies can provide viewing opportunities without the expense of plane flights, tours could become even more profitable. Lower prices will attract more viewers. Both trends will increase pressure for more and better viewing opportunities.

4. **<u>Bear Viewing Management at Other Destinations -- 3 examples</u>**

a. At ***Wolverine Creek***, viewers are contained in a boat, which keeps them from getting dangerously close to bears. They regularly get within 10 yards, sometimes within 5 yards; but they cannot make direct contact. Nor do bears try to contact them.

b. On the ***coast of Katmai National Park*,** viewers wander freely and sometimes get equally close to bears. But nearly all viewers are there in groups of 5-10 people, led by a guide with more knowledge then most viewers have about how to safely watch bears. This grouping of people, acting with at lest moderate wisdom, keeps them reasonably safe. No one has been even scratched by a bear during tends of thousands of visitor-days of viewing.

c. **At *Brooks River in Katmai* and at *Hyder in SE Alaska***, viewers move around without a guide, but under the supervision of rangers. Most viewing is done from a platform that separates viewers from bears.

5. **<u>Managing Viewings on the Russian River</u>**

a. ***Current Situation***: Viewers move around freely, without any agency supervision and without a guide. Even were rangers or guides available, some people would wander around independently and watch bears whenever and however they could. Last summer, bear jams formed along boardwalks, ramps, steps down to the river, and gravel bars. Riparian vegetation was trampled as viewers crossed railings and fences to get clearer views of bears. As bears approached, some viewers neglected to move back and give them space. Viewers also crowded close to bears – although fortunately not so close that they provoked aggression.

b. ***Future Viewing on the Lower Russian***: If there was any spot along the lower Russian where bears could be reliably viewed, then this spot might be managed for bear viewing by building a platform on the river side of vegetation, providing a clear view of the bears, and confining viewers where they could not get dangerously close to bears. However, I know of no such site. Any one seeking bears has had to search up and down the riverside trail, looking for them, especially where salmon carcasses accumulate. The only way I see to deal with viewing on the lower Russian is to provide one or more guides to supervise viewing wherever bears show up. This would probably require several guides who stay in contact with cell phones or radios to alert one another about where bears are visible. An allied tactic is providing better viewing opportunities elsewhere that lure viewers away from the lower Russian. That will likely work for most people except (a) those who want to remain near family members who are fishing the lower Russian; and (b) those unwilling or unable to hike to another site.

c. ***Future Viewing at the Falls or on the Upper Russian*** Primary alternative viewing sites include the Falls and above the Falls. If the weir or any other site at or above the Falls provides reliable viewing opportunities, I would recommend construction of one or more viewing platforms, widening trails to these sites to minimize surprise encounters with bears. A charge of say $10 per viewer could cover costs of construction and of supervision by an expert on bear behavior and safety who is also a skilled interpretive guide. Bear education materials could be provided on-site and during evening campground programs (e.g., at the Russian River pavilion). Even if anglers do not attend evening programs, other family members might; and what those members learn about bears might be shared with the anglers. Guiding viewers, supervising them, and educating them might be done by either agency personnel or by a concessionaire, such as ARM. Whoever is stationed at the viewing site should keep in radio/phone contact with the Russian River Campground contact station and with the campground manager so that visitors can learn when bears are present at the viewing site. Otherwise, the 2-mile hike to the Falls will deter many potential viewers.

d. ***Downstream from the ferry***: Naturally, viewers would prefer sites which do not require such a long hike, if any. Were salmon carcasses deposited downstream from the powerline, in a backwater, viewing from a boat could be reasonably safe, convenient and affordable. Landward access to the site could be strictly controlled to minimize surprise bear-human encounters. An alternative approach would be to build a platform there, accessed by a single, wide footpath from the ferry crossing to the viewing area, replacing the current maze of trails through vegetation so dense that most encounters with bears are close range surprise encounters. Assuming that we would prefer viewing to occur where bears feed naturally, not on human-provided carcasses, this option might be implemented only if diversionary feeding at such a site proves necessary to reduce bear-human conflicts on the LRR.

e. ***Guide qualifications***: As a general rule in Alaska, any one can guide bear viewers who can find people who will pay to view. There is no requirement for a license or certificate of training in bear safety, bear biology, interpretive skills, etc. However, the need for at least certification is becoming more widely accepted even for remote sites where most viewers arrive with a guide. The need for bear-expertise is especially great for guides in areas like the Russian River where viewing situations could be more chaotic.

Just as KPC has provided a program for certifying fishing guides on the Kenai River, it might provide one for bear viewing guides on the KP. KPC President Gary Turner and I discussed this when I taught a *Bears & Bear Safety* course through the U of Alaska (Kenai and MatSu campuses). But back then, the time was not ripe. It may be now.

While teaching that course, I realized that existing manuals on bear safety were inadequate due to obsolete understanding of bear behavior and to excessive focus on conditions outside Alaska. Although I provided handouts to supplement those texts, this did not assure that students would have a permanent record of what was taught. So I quit teaching temporarily while I wrote more appropriate texts. These are:

a. Alaska Magnum Bear Safety Manual (2009)
b. When Bears Whisper, Do You Listen (2010)
c. Ghost Grizzlies and Other Rare Bruins (2011)
d. The Language of Bears (scheduled for release in 2012, once another $2000 in funding are obtained).

I will soon resume teaching. Guides could take that course to make sure they are fully up to speed. Granted, some might object that they already work as guides and don't need to learn anything else. However, those who have paid close attention to my educational materials have been surprised at how much they had not known which they could put to good use.

Last spring, I began producing PowerPoint presentations to supplement the texts. Just as the first techniques taught in the *Alaska Magnum Bear Safety Manual* are those of safe hiking in bear country, that was the first PowerPoint presentation – although this PP is specifically tailored to situations in the vicinity of the Russian and upper Kenai Rivers. Other PP presentations, with video as well as slides, are planned. They would cover fishing, camping, viewing, and direct confrontations with bears. Given that each hour-long presentation requires a minimum of 50-100 hrs of preparation, above and beyond that required to take the slides and video footage, funding to cover my time and expenses would be welcome and would speed the process. Even help in obtaining grants would be welcome.

Derek Stonorov has taught a bear course, with different emphasis, at the Homer branch of KPC. Jim? Dodge is teaching a course for guides at the Kodiak campus. Mr. Dodge is also a bear hunting guide and, as I understand, guides bear viewers much as he guides bear hunters – i.e., he and clients sneak up on the bears and watch them from hiding. That isn't the kind of experience that most viewers seek in rest of Alaska. So too, I don't think that this is the kind of experience that would be sought by most visitors to the Russian River or upper Kenai.

I am not sure whether the Dodge or the Kodiak bear management committee issues certificates to guides. But the *Bear Viewing Association* (of which I am Director) has worked a lot on this. Having a citizen's organization provide certification of guides – much as NAUI provides certification for scuba divers – means that the University would not be liable if a guide fails to keep a client safe.

f. ***Agency Personnel*** likely to frequently encounter bears, and especially those dealing with bear viewers, might also benefit from such intensive training.

On-Site Public Education

1. **Angler Tunnel Vision**

Despite my own dedication to educating the public about bears, I am not optimistic on how effective this is at changing the behavior of anglers.

When anglers visit the LRR, they tend to have one track minds. Those that pass through the RR campground contact station or through the ferry station, tend to show no interest in hearing or reading anything about bear safety. Contact station personnel feel under strong pressure to process visitors as quickly as possible, especially when there is a long waiting line. They also feel discouraged by obvious disinterest and sometimes verbal rebuffs when they try to inform visitors, especially locals who have "heard it all before," whether or not they have learned anything in the process.

2. **Handouts**: The brochure distributed by the USFS last summer is highly attractive and informative. But it has one major defect. When contact station personnel hand it to a visitor, they have to search each time to open it at the pages addressing bear safety. Ideally, key safety information would be summarized on the back page so that no searching is required by either contact station personnel or visitors. The summary page could list other pages with additional information. During the several minute drive from the contact station to a parking spot, passengers can read it even if the driver does not.

Consider offering a reward program whereby anglers are questioned along the LRR by someone (e.g., Streamwatch or YRC kids) about bear safety trips. Those who answer questions correctly win a small prize – e.g., a lottery ticket for a substantial prize to be drawn at the end of the week. Or the person might be given a prize ticket similar to those that McDonalds and other fast-food businesses pass out to clients. A brief but boldly visible notice about this could be placed at the top of a bear safety page.

3. The "**secret shopper**" program is a good idea for motivating contact station personnel. But it might work even better if it focused on successes rather than failures. When personnel in a contact station failed to pass out a brochure or to verbally inform visitors about bear safety issues, they have been called to task. But there have been no rewards for doing it right. ARM is considering how to do this. The USFS and USFWS might do the same, perhaps by offering small rewards in the form of a lottery ticket, movie ticket, video rental coupon, certificate of appreciation, etc.

4. **Warning notices along the RR**. When a backpack, cooler, etc. is found unattended, one might attach a small tag reading something like "If I were a bear, I'd be eating your lunch right now."

5. **Bear Viewers**

Visitors eager to see bears seem much more interested than anglers in learning about bears, both from the perspectives of personal safety and general knowledge. The more that viewers learn about proper etiquette around bears, the more likely they are to share this knowledge with anglers – especially if viewers are and anglers members of the same family (e.g., if Mom and the kids watch bears while Dad fishes). However, even viewers don't want to sit through a lecture before they arrive at the river or while they are watching bears. So, although interpretation can go on while viewing is underway, more detailed talks might best occur while visitors wait for bears to show up – which is when I have had best luck educating viewers at Wolverine Creek, Katmai, etc.

6. **Riverside contacts**: Although anglers are not likely to be interested in learning about bears while they fish, waiting family members and bear viewers might be, as noted above. Handouts could be provided there, supplemented by verbal information.

7. **Evening Presentations:**

a. A video produced by Larry Lewis of ADF&G has been shown at the ferry ticket office. It might also be shown at evening presentations near the ferry and/or at nearby campgrounds.

b. ARM is willing to provide talks. However, translating willingness into implementation would be facilitated by financial incentives from the agencies.

What can any of the government agencies do to help cover the cost, either directly or through assistance in securing grants? If production of educational videos and/or PowerPoints is to be put out to bid, I would suggest putting emphasis on content rather than slickness – lest we end up with yet another presentation that is looks professional to unsophisticated audiences, but which is unintentionally misleading, perhaps dangerously so.