

**Subject: Bear Safety****APPROVALS:****Jamie Doyle**\_\_\_\_\_  
Director\_\_\_\_\_  
Chief Administrative Officer**Recommended Motion:**

THAT Administration pursue an official BearSmart Community designation.

**Summary:**

On June 9, 2020 Council passed the following resolution:

“WHEREAS Bear Safety has been identified as a concern for residents within the Region;

AND WHEREAS as a result of the 2020 flood there are concerns that an increase in bear activity may occur;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Administration be directed to review the Alberta BearSmart Program and bring forward recommendations on how the RMWB could implement BearSmart strategies to minimize the risk of bear encounters, including awareness and education programs. It was noted that these recommendations may include amendments to the Solid Waste Bylaw No. 07/043 and the Land Use Bylaw No. 99/059 to control bear attractants and to promote bear awareness and safety practices within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB).”

This report is provided in response to this resolution and as an update to the public on the importance of the Alberta BearSmart Program throughout the region.

**Background:**

The management of black bear is the responsibility of Fish and Wildlife, a division of the Alberta Ministry of Environment and Parks. Fish and Wildlife provide information, regulations, and legislation on fish and wildlife species. Fish and Wildlife Enforcement, a division of the Justice and Solicitor General, enforce laws, protect life and property, and deliver public education.

Research conducted by the Government of Alberta indicates black bears have extended their range into former habitats and can now be found in almost 75% of Alberta. This has resulted in increased and undesirable interactions with humans.

The Alberta BearSmart Program Manual (Attachment 1) is one tool used by the Province to empower Albertans to make safe decisions in bear territory, help bear populations survive by educating people, and reduce property damage caused by bears. The Program does this with a focus on education, raising public awareness, identifying deterrents, preparing people for a potential encounter, and reinforcing safe BearSmart practices.

While the management of the species lies with the provincial government, all residents and visitors in our region play an important role in living by the recommendations identified in the Program, including the Municipality. The Alberta BearSmart Program Guide (2011) indicates, *“garbage and human food are the two main causes of conflicts between humans and bears. Human foods and garbage are strong attractants to bears. A successful bear is a well-fed bear, and a bear will soon learn that garbage and human food can be an easily available food source... Proper garbage storage and disposal is vital as a preventive measure to reduce conflicts between humans and bears.”*

While opportunities exist to enhance municipal services to assist residents in reducing attractants (through the use of deterrents), there are significant opportunities to enhance collaboration with Fish and Wildlife and support residents in developing safe BearSmart habits which could have a longer lasting, more positive impact on our region.

## **DETERRENTS**

Deterrents are used to reduce or eliminate an attractant to a bear. Depending on the attractant, this may include noise or physical deterrents such as: an airhorn, bear spray, a firearm, bear-proof storage containers, etc. The Municipality has implemented operational deterrents that support the reduction of attractants including waste bins, collection services and landfill/transfer stations.

## **WASTE BINS**

Large scale residential (i.e. apartment complexes), commercial, industrial, and institutional waste enclosures are regulated through the Land Use Bylaw, and in conjunction with the Engineering Servicing Standards. The Land Use Bylaw requires all:

- multi-family developments (*section 72.8(d)*);
- commercial and urban industrial districts (*section 72.9(i)*); and,
- campgrounds (*section 90.1(f)*),

to have garbage and waste material stored in weatherproof and animal proof containers. While the Municipality is currently undergoing a re-write of the Land Use Bylaw, these requirements remain and the proposed draft will broaden the intent further,

such that all commercial, industrial, institutional and multi-unit residential developments require garbage and waste materials stored in weather and animal-proof containers, inclusive of both urban and rural areas. Commercial waste is also addressed in Solid Waste Bylaw No. 07/043. Specifically, Section 30 provides the requirements for which non-compliant fines may be issued:

*“The owner or occupant of a commercial enterprise generating commercial waste shall:*

*(b) ensure that waste does not accumulate on or within the premises occupied by the commercial enterprise, unless the waste is stored in waste receptacles or mobile waste bins suitable for such purposes, fitted with covers suitable to prevent waste from spilling or being blown from the waste receptacles or mobile waste bins, and to prevent animals from gaining access to the waste.”*

For single family dwellings, Section 15 of the Solid Waste Bylaw No. 07/043 provides the requirements for residential waste:

*“The occupant shall:*

*(a) keep and maintain all waste receptacles on his/her premises in a safe and sanitary condition;*

*(b) place and keep all waste receptacles within the rear portion of the residential premises, or within the side yards, if screened from the view of public occupying adjacent streets or other premises;*

*(g) ensure that all waste is placed at the appropriate collection point between 12:00 a.m. (midnight) and 7:30 a.m. on the designated collection day for the residential area in which they reside, and that waste receptacles are returned to their normal storage location within 12 hours after being emptied.”*

The Municipality also implemented a bear-proof bin program which provided residences in Draper, Saprae Creek, Gregoire Lake Estates and Anzac two bins when the pilot commenced: one regular bin for use during the winter when bears are hibernating and one bear-proof bin for the remaining seasons. Currently, refuse collection in the rural areas with bear-proof bins requires two employees per truck; a helper is required to assist the driver of the fully automated trucks to unlatch the bear bins. In these areas, some inconsistencies have been noted, including residents placing both the regular bin and bear-proof bin for their weekly collection, residents not using their bear-proof bins in the warmer months, and bear-proof bins with drilled out latches. The bear-proof bin program in these areas requires review and provides an opportunity to re-address the intent of the program.

Lastly, municipal facilities and park spaces have implemented bear-proof bins and containers in many areas and will continue to work closely with Fish and Wildlife to

address any areas of concern.

## **COLLECTION SERVICES**

Residential curbside waste is collected for the residents of Fort Chipewyan, Fort McKay Metis, Fort McMurray, Draper, Saprae Creek, Gregoire Lake, Anzac, Janvier Hamlet, and Conklin through a combination of municipal services and municipally contracted services. The collection frequency for these communities is uniform - services occur weekly. Fort Fitzgerald does not receive municipal collection services and the First Nations of Fort McKay and Janvier coordinate refuse services through their band.

In some communities, contracted services are utilized, and collection equipment is not in place to manage the curbside (or bear-proof) bins utilized in other settings. In these communities, materials are hand thrown into the curbside collection vehicle. Contracted crews are reminded to maintain prompt schedules to ensure pick-up of bagged materials adheres to the timelines provided to residents and reduces the duration of time attractants remain curbside.

More information on Community-Level Solid Waste Services is available on Attachment 2.

## **LANDFILLS AND TRANSFER STATIONS**

The Municipality maintains and operates three landfills and six transfer stations. These facilities are designed to facilitate the proper disposal or recycling of materials through a wide array of programs.

More information on Community-Level Solid Waste Services is available on Attachment 2.

## **COLLABORATION AND INFORMATION SHARING**

Signage is posted at trailheads and boat launches throughout the region advising of the potential for bear activity due to our geographic location in the northern boreal forest. Additional signage is also posted when a bear is observed in the area. This visual reminder to residents is intended to prompt bear awareness and readiness in the event of a confrontation. Also, ongoing communication between municipal Parks staff and Fish and Wildlife during the summer months allows the municipality to provide access to land to set traps and notification when traps have sprung.

While the Municipality does not undertake public information campaigns regarding wildlife in the region, information is available on [rmwb.ca](http://rmwb.ca) to direct residents to Fish and Wildlife. There may also be opportunities to amplify messaging addressed in the Alberta BearSmart Program and raise awareness throughout the region. Specifically, this could include practices for residents to consider reducing attractants at their homes, such as:

- Adhering to the proper times for placing garbage to the curb (0730 hrs)

and not placing garbage at the curb the night before.

- Proper storage of bins for waste or recyclables which may include storage in the garage or shed.
- Sealing thrown-out food in plastic bags or disposable air-tight containers.
- Dedicating a portion of the freezer to store spoiled foods, removing them once weekly in line with curbside collection.
- Adding lime to the garbage to eliminate odors that can attract bears.
- Separating food waste from non-food garbage and keeping discarded food materials in a garage or shed until garbage pick-up day.
- Leaving a bright light on the bins.
- Washing containers to be thrown away or recycled before placing them in garbage cans to reduce odors that can attract the bears.
- Regular cleaning of garbage cans using disinfectants, bleach or white vinegar. Spray the inside with ammonia between cleanings to help discourage bears.
- Ensuring barbeques are cleaned regularly.
- Storing pet food and feeding pets inside.

In addition to sharing public information, there are opportunities to invite Fish and Wildlife Officers to participate in municipal public engagements or during their peak season, distribute pamphlets or materials on their behalf at municipal events. In the event Fish and Wildlife Officers suspect or observe negligence on industrial or residential property that repeatedly attracts bears, they are encouraged to share information on BearSmart practices that may reduce attractants. Further, they are encouraged to reach out to Bylaw Services to address bylaw non-compliance.

Ultimately, ongoing collaboration with Fish and Wildlife to address BearSmart best practices leads to the pursuit of an official BearSmart Community <<https://www.alberta.ca/bearsmart-communities-overview.aspx>> designation. This is identified as a long-range goal of the Alberta BearSmart Program and would require significant organization-wide collaboration to complete a number of steps that impact each of our communities.

### **Alternatives:**

As identified in the Alberta BearSmart Program, attractant reduction and elimination play a key role in reducing bear presence in urban settings. While there are many

opportunities for residents and visitors to practice BearSmart strategies as indicated above, there are also opportunities for the Municipality to enhance service levels which may assist residents in removing or reducing bear attractants on their properties. These examples include:

- increasing the frequency of curbside collection services;
- the requirement for bear-proof bins region-wide; and/or
- extending hours at the landfills or transfer stations.

These alternatives are not recommended by Administration at this time. While they may assist residents in reducing attractants, they should not be treated as assurances and require more careful review through the steps identified in pursuing a BearSmart Community designation. For example, while increased collection services and extended landfill/transfer station hours may remove attractants from homes more frequently (if residents utilize them), odors in the bin remain a strong attractant if they are not cleaned regularly and properly. The same logic could be applied to bear-proof bins. Lastly, prohibitions on gardens, select fruits, vegetables, or fruit bearing trees was not identified as an alternative at this time as it requires further review.

#### **Budget/Financial Implications:**

The budget impact associated with each of the alternatives has not yet been fully explored. However, the pursuit of an official BearSmart Community <<https://www.alberta.ca/bearsmart-communities-overview.aspx>> designation would have an operational (and potentially capital) budget impact and should be considered.

#### **Rationale for Recommendation:**

Reducing bear attractants is a collaborative effort. While the work of one resident, homeowner or business owner can make a positive impact, the negligence of one can have a devastating effect for all. Information provided in the Alberta BearSmart Program should be amplified to ensure the people in our region remain safe, human-caused bear mortalities are reduced, and property damage is prevented.

#### **Strategic Priorities:**

Responsible Government  
Rural and Indigenous Communities and Partnerships

#### **Attachments:**

**1. Alberta BearSmart Program Manual**

**2. Community-Level Solid Waste Service Summary**