

MEETING SUMMARY
Wolverine Creek Management Committee
Tuesday, October 28, 2003, 6:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.
Dimond Center Hotel, Anchorage

Meeting Participants

Committee Members: Mark Glassmaker, Lance Desaw, Peter Thompson, Fred Hirschman, Jeremy Schimmel, Mark Bell. Alternates not seated at the table: Mike Cowan, Steve Stringham, Carl Dixon,

Meeting Attendees:

Todd Rust, Mark Carr, George Matz, John Czarnecki, John Troxel, Becky Brock

ADF&G Staff: Sport Fish Division: Tom Vania, Wayne Dolezal, Mark Burch; *Division of Wildlife Conservation:* Jeff Hughes, Colleen Matt, Joe Meehan, Doug Hill, Teri Arnold

Meeting Purpose

To evaluate the 2003 season, review management objectives and guidelines, and discuss issues of common concern.

Welcome, Opening Remarks and Process Review

Committee members were introduced, as well as staff and members and the public. Lisa O'Brien reviewed the agenda and ground rules. Jeff Hughes reviewed the formation of the Wolverine Creek Management Committee (WCMC), and its purpose and accomplishment thus far. Jeff commented that if this previous season was any indication, the Management Committee was working quite well. Lisa reminded everyone that the purpose of the meeting was to evaluate whether we've met our management objectives and substantive decisions will probably be deferred until the spring meeting.

'03 Season Review using Criteria For Measuring Success

Each of the 6 management objectives was reviewed separately, with Joe Meehan of ADF&G giving the initial review. The 6 management objectives for Wolverine Creek were developed from state law, regulations, and the Redoubt Bay Critical Habitat Area Management Plan. At the spring WCMC meeting, the department presented criteria for measuring success at achieving each of the management objectives.

Recorded incidents refer to events observed or investigated by ADF&G staff stationed at Wolverine Creek. *Reports* refer to information received from guides and visitors, but not observed or substantiated by ADF&G staff

1. No food-conditioning of bears

Criterion 1) Number of events where bears obtained fish, food or garbage from people.

Number of Incidents ¹		Assessment
2002	2003	
3	0	Very good

The assessment showed improvement since last year. This problem has been alleviated over the past 5 years. The improvement can be attributed to a number of causes such as: a) no more use of

¹ "Incidents" are only events that ADF&G staff observed. There may have been more incidents that ADF&G didn't observe, so these figures are not meant to be an absolute number.

stringers (we had no incidents this year whereas they were common in the past); b) the use of fish containers (we only had 3 incidents this year when someone did not have a container or didn't have a lid for their container; c) no fish were deposited on the banks, and d) visitors were not cooking and preparing food in the cove (we only had one incident this summer where someone brought a steaming BBQ into the cove).

However, we did observe 3 incidents that raised concern. Two of these were guided clients posing for pictures in their boat against the rocks while they were holding up their day's catch. A bear positioned above showed interest in these fish that were basically dangling 10 feet away.

Criterion 2) Number of events where bears were attracted to hooked or netted fish

Number of Incidents		Assessment
2002	2003	
20+? ²	23	Very good, Can Improve

In 2003, ADF&G staff recorded 23 incidents where bears were attracted to fish. Of these 23 incidents, the angler or guide took the appropriate response in 20 incidents (breaking the line as soon as possible, opening the bail as soon as possible, etc). In 2002 ADF&G staff did not consistently record these types of incidents, but of the 20 recorded incidents in 2002, the angler or guide took the appropriate response in 12 incidents.

Other related observations include the following:

- ⇒ Casting toward bears: In 2003 we recorded 26 incidents. In 2002, we only recorded 17 incidents. However, we didn't consistently record these types of data and there were certainly many more.
- ⇒ Cease fishing when a bear approaches: In 2003 we only had 7 incidents. In 2002 we recorded 36 incidents but this number was likely much higher.
- ⇒ Bleeding fish in landing net or leaving fish in landing net and in the water for a prolonged period of time: In 2003 we saw no incidents of this type. In 2002, we saw 3 incidents.

By this criterion, the situation has improved some since 2002, and it has greatly improved over the past 5 years. This improvement was primarily the result of visitors pulling in their lines when a bear was near, and taking appropriate action when a bear focused its attention on hooked fish. However, we feel there is still room for improvement when it comes to casting toward bears, and this will require visitors and guides to be more vigilant

Criterion 3) Number of events where fish were cleaned and carcasses deposited in the cove or in an area accessible to bears.

Number of Incidents		Assessment
2002	2003	
13++	5+	Very Good - in cove Fair - outside Cove

In 2003, no fish cleaning or carcasses were observed in the cove; but 5 incidents were observed (one at the entrance to the cove, three at Fisher Falls, and one at Weasel Lake. We also received 8 reports about carcasses being filleted and disposed onshore and nearshore outside the cove. ADF&G staff observed bears feeding on these carcasses on 3 occasions.

In 2002, there were 6 incidents observed in the cove and 7 were observed outside the cove. In addition we received many reports of fish cleaning and carcasses deposited, particularly at Fisher Falls.

² In 2002 ADF&G staff did not consistently record these types of incidents, so the figure given is likely a low estimate.

We also observed bears feeding on these carcasses on 4 occasions in the cove and 4 occasions elsewhere on the lake. We received similar reports from other people.

The situation has improved greatly in the cove and, while we have seen some improvement outside the cove, it is still a problem. We think it is limited to only a few individuals.

Criterion 4) The number of bears shot in defense of life & property (DLP).

Number of Incidents		Assessment
2002	2003	
0	0	Very Good

No bears were shot in the past 2 years. By this criterion, we're doing very well. The last DLP was in 1995. From 1990 – 1995 there were 5 bears shot at Wolverine Creek, presumably due to threatening situations.

WCMC Discussion

Members and alternates agreed that the summer went well. There was some discussion about the definition of food-conditioning. Food-conditioning refers to bears getting something to eat from visitors, whether it's human food, fish parts, hooked fish, or garbage. Food-conditioning does not include curious subadults pulling on anchor ropes. Visitors are welcome to eat lunch on the boats; however, it is unwise to dangle caught fish in front of a bear on the boulders. Doug noted there are locations and situations within the cove when and where it not wise to have food (a barbecued and steaming fillet of salmon for example) lying on the deck of the boat.

Colleen will circulate the “scientific” definition of food-conditioning to the committee prior to the next meeting.

2. Minimize displacement of bears during summer

Criterion 1) Number of incidents that visitors actively displaced or harassed bears.

Number of Incidents		Assessment
2002	2003	
7+	9	Good Can Improve

This criterion shows our observations of visitors actively displacing or harassing bears. Active displacement means to “push” bears out by motoring up on them; making noise such as yelling, banging on the boat, splashing, etc; or actions that result in bears being disturbed.

In 2003, the 9 incidents included 5 bears that were “pushed” out by boats, presumably to get into a good fishing spot, 2 incidents of people making noise to push a bear away, and 2 incidents of planes flying low over the cove. We also received several reports of people pushing bears out of their way.

While we only recorded 7 incidents in 2002, the number was likely much higher as we did not consistently record these events.

We are also concerned about some other actions that may influence bears. These other actions include boats closely pursuing bears along the shoreline (< 30'). We noted this twice this year and 3 times in 2002. Following too closely may prevent bears from fishing or otherwise using the lakeshore.

Overall, we have seen progress in the past 5 years though it seems that there is still room for improvement. We recognize that the dramatic increase in visitation over the past 5 years may displace bears through outright crowding. We hope the WSU study will help give us a profile of what and where

displacement is occurring. We will withhold major assessment of displacement until those results are finalized in the spring.

In 2003 we estimate that there were about 8,704 visitors, which is about 300 fewer than last year.

Criterion 2) Number of incidents where visitors were walking on the shoreline in the cove

Number of Incidents		Assessment
2002	2003	
22+	11	Very Good

In 2003, we observed 11 incidents, primarily people getting out on the boulders for various reasons. We also received 2 reports from guides or visitors. In 2002 we recorded 22 incidents but there were probably many more as we did not consistently record these data.

Our assessment of success by this criterion was very good. We saw improvement over the past 2 years it has greatly improved over the past 5 years.

Criterion 3) Number of aggressive encounters between visitors and bears.

For clarification, this criterion refers to bears threatening visitors, usually in pursuit of food, fish or garbage. It is intended to indicate the level of food-conditioning behaviors in the bears.

Number of Incidents		Assessment
2002	2003	
2	2	Very Good

There were 2 incidents this summer where visitors felt they needed to take action to respond to an approaching bear, and we recognize that the appropriate response to an approaching bear is to deter it with an appropriate amount of assertiveness. We also received one report of a bear being aggressive with people at the outhouse.

In 2002, we observed 2 incidents where a visitor felt they needed to take action to respond to an approaching bear. We also received a report of a bear being aggressive with people at the outhouse.

We have observed 2 bears in each of the past 2 years that had fishing flies stuck to them; however, this is probably less than what occurred in the past. We feel that bears should never come in contact with active fishing gear (but we recognize they may if the line is already broken and they brush against it).

The situation regarding aggressive interactions has been good over the past 2 years and it has greatly improved over the past 5 years. This is probably attributed to bears not getting fish from people and learning to approach them. Visitors are not attracting bears with 1) struggling fish; 2) improperly stored fish; 3) fish carcasses; and 4) visitors remaining in their boats and off the shoreline.

Criterion 4) Number of bears using Wolverine Creek

This criterion looks at the number of bears using Wolverine Creek. The premise is that we don't want to significantly alter the natural number of bears using the site.

Number of Incidents		Assessment
2002	2003	
28	27	Good, but...

In 2003, 16 independent bears (adults and subadults) and 12 cubs used Wolverine Creek for a total of 28 bears.

In 2002, 19 independent bears (adults and subadults) and 8 cubs used Wolverine Creek for a total of 27 bears.

Though the bear numbers are consistent between the 2 years, this is a poor indicator of the health of the small group of bears that use Wolverine Creek cove. We need to redefine this criterion to evaluate the bears' access to fish. We will be better able to address this in the spring after WSU presents their results of the study.

WCMC:

The tally of visitors was discussed. The estimate of 8,704 visitors was derived from commercial operator self-reporting plus the observed number of private visitors.

There was concern about who was doing the low-level flying resulting in bear harassment. One incident involved a private plane and the other involved a guide service plane. Both planes flew over the cove from the west (down Wolverine Creek valley). The ADF&G staff have spoken to the pilots. A committee member suggested that all WCMC members should be talking to offending pilots, not just ADF&G staff.

The cited figures refer only to brown bears as researchers are unable to positively identify the individual, ephemeral black bears.

Peter inquired about the bear carrying capacity for the cove. Will the number of bears increase if there are fewer boats? ADF&G staff responded that the graduate study might give us more information. These are good questions for the spring meeting.

Jeremy suggested that credit for the success of the evaluation of this Management Objective is owed to the guides for their efforts at educating visitors. We need to give kudos to users. He also said that flies in the bears' hides do not mean that anglers are purposefully casting toward bears. Flies usually come from scavenged dead fish Doug agreed that flies in bear does not necessarily mean that angler are purposefully casting towards bears, however ADF&G has observed flies and lines landing on and very close to bears.

Criterion 4, the number of bears, was discussed. All agreed that it was not a valid measure of success because of fluctuation in bear populations.

There was discussion about the criticisms leveled in the email comments. Jeremy suggested that Redoubt Bay Lodge employees encourage their clients to complain via emails. Carl said that the lodge's field guide has the Wolverine Creek address and they do solicit comments. He assured the group that Redoubt Bay Lodge does have nearly 2,000 happy visitors each year. Additionally, not all of the comments in the handout were solicited from RB Lodge.

Jeremy said that in a 2-½ week period, he and another guide service gathered over 500 evaluation forms showing great visitor satisfaction. He suggested that ADF&G post the Wolverine Creek email address at the cove so that we can get a more positive (and therefore valid) measure of public satisfaction. John Czarnezki offered that the written and email comments are to be used to improve management, not used as a voting record.

Alternate member Steve Stringham said the number of problems was relatively insignificant. However we would benefit from a better definition of harassment and disturbance. Perhaps visitors don't have a good feel for what they are.

John Czarnezki asked if any citations been issued at Wolverine Creek. Joe replied that only fishing-related citations have been issued. Most guidelines are not enforceable. Warnings are given, but no citations. He also asked whether bears are counted twice in Criteria #1 and #3. Bears were not

counted twice. Overlap can occur in some of the criteria. He also pointed out that the guidelines don't address any buffer from the bear if visitors are not fishing.

Mark Glassmaker said that the brochure is great. All users should give them to their clients ahead of time.

There were comments in email form calling for some sort of buffer zone. There were also comments suggesting that ADF&G limit the number of visitors by permits and/or user fees.

3. Minimize negative impacts to fish and wildlife habitat

Criterion 1) Feet of shoreline and islands impacted by boat storage and retrieval

Number of Incidents		Assessment
2002	2003	
Authorized 240ft Unauthorized 109ft	Authorized 240 ft Unauthorized 193ft	Poor, Needs attention

In 2003, the floating islands where boats were once stored have recovered. However, there were 3 incidents of people walking on the islands. We now have 240 linear feet of shoreline habitat impacted at the authorized boat storage site, yet we also have 193 linear feet of shoreline impact at unauthorized locations, primarily near Fisher Falls and the outlet of the lake.

By comparison, in 2002 we had 8 incidents of people on the islands. We had the same amount of impact in the authorized location, and we had an additional 109 linear feet impacted at unauthorized sites.

The area impacted by boat storage and people walking on the shoreline is expanding as more users store their boats in unauthorized areas. There were 3 permit-holders last year that stored boats outside the designated area; this year there were 4. We need to address and reverse these impacts as the shoreline habitat is vital for salmon rearing.

Criterion 2) Sockeye salmon escapement in Wolverine Creek

Number of Incidents		Assessment
2002	2003	
Unknown	Unknown	Unknown (Video camera in 2004)

While the Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association estimated escapement at 17,000 to 33,000 fish in the early 1980's, we don't know what the escapement is today. The run appears to be healthy at this time. The Sport Fish division will be installing a remote video camera along the creek next summer to estimate escapement. The camera will be placed this along the creek and out of view from the lake.

Criterion 3) Number and type of visitors by day and by hour

	Number of Visitors		Assessment
	2002	2003	
Total	9,090	8,704	Unknown WSU study results in spring 2004
Private, non-guided	685	634	
Composition	65% anglers 35% non-anglers	69% anglers 31% non-anglers	

There were 8,704 visitors this year, included 600-700 private visitors (about 1/3 were strictly bear viewing, 2/3 a combination of fishing and bear viewing).

We're waiting for more detailed and rigorously collected information before assessing the impacts of this level of visitation on bears and their ability to use their habitat. Results from the study by WSU will help address this in the spring.

Criterion 4) Number of incidents where people used the cove shoreline as a latrine

Number of Incidents		Assessment
2002	2003	
6	1	Good Greatly improved from early years)

There was only one incident of someone venturing into the bushes this summer, while in 2002 there were 6 incidents. In the early years, it was a constant problem not only as a sanitary issue, but also as a human safety and bear disturbance issue.

A related issue is the amount of litter found around the lake. While amounts were not great, there were 7 incidents of food scraps (banana peels and onion peels), soda cans, food wrappers and toilet paper found in the cove, at the boat storage site and other locations. Guides keeping an eye on clients and better private visitor behavior can eliminate littering.

WCMC Discussion

Jeremy mentioned that airplane safety should be included in any discussion of shoreline impacts. He also wondered if the lake shorelines were salmon habitat and was told that salmon fingerlings reared there. He said the photos on the Powerpoint presentation cast visitors and guides in a bad light.

Fred mentioned that boat storage near Fisher Falls was causing impacts and Mark Glassmaker said that mid-season flooding caused boats to move. Peter added that wind could cause boats to sink.

ADF&G staff said that this was a particularly difficult problem to solve and asked the committee to weigh in with suggestions. On the one hand, we need to conserve the salmon-rearing habitat on the shoreline and do not want to have new and independent boat storage sites being created wherever and whenever someone wants to move. On the other hand, flooding and safety are issues. Options include operators building floating docks and bank stabilization with geotextiles.

An email comment suggested that ADF&G change fishing regulations to allow snagging. Sport Fish representative Tom Vania said that the department and the Board of Fish would never authorize a snagging fishery at Wolverine Creek because it would increase visitation and increase mortality.

There were 3 more email comments calling for better monitoring of the fishery.

4. Maintain recreational opportunities in a high-quality environment

Criterion 1) Phone or in-person interviews of randomly selected visitors to measure satisfaction, crowding, noise, etc.

Number of Incidents		Assessment
2002	2003	
Not done	Not done	Unknown Need to complete

ADF&G lacks the funding to complete these interviews every year. We hope to conduct them in 2004/2005 depending on staff availability.

Criterion 2) Number and type of complaints related to quality of recreational experience

	Number of Complaints		Assessment
	2002	2003	
Written	8+	1	Better Issues remain
Verbal	40	27	

In 2003, we received 12 written comments/complaints and 27 verbal complaints. The verbal complaints were mostly in-person at Wolverine Creek, though some were by phone. Whereas, in 2002 we received about 8 written comments/complaints and 40 verbal complaints. Most of the verbal complaints were about too many people and/or boats, bears being displaced, private people being driven out by commercial operators, fishing too close to bears, guidelines not being adequately followed or compliance with them decreases when F&G is not present, etc. About 5 complaints of planes buzzing the cove were received each year.

This year, we also received numerous complaints (not reported in these figures) about the rotation of “The Hog Line.” The comments included: who gets to be in the hog line? Someone cutting in front of someone, etc. There were also some reports of fish carcasses being left at Fisher Falls.

Most of the written comments we have received are asking for further restrictions on the activities witnessed at Wolverine Creek. However, this may not be an accurate portrayal of the overall feeling as visitors tend to write more complaints rather than compliments. Visitors may be more apt to write when encouraged to do so by someone else, particularly a guide or other person with authority. We could also gauge public satisfaction by the general comments received at Wolverine Creek and which tend to be mixed.

Probably not much difference in the amount or kind of complaints between the past 2 years, but the numbers are down from the early years. Complaints and comments now tend to be more directed rather than just complaining in general. There appears to remain plenty of issues; some can be addressed by stricter adherence to the guidelines, while others can only be addressed by additional actions.

Discussion WCMC

Committee members discussed the apparently one-sided representation of complaints in the verbal and written comments. It was suggested that Jeremy’s letters be added to the collection. Jeff Hughes assured the group that the verbal and written comments were not counted as a tally; but were used to find out if there are issues that we’re missing that need to be resolved.

Mark Glassmaker asked about ADF&G plans to implement a survey. Jeff Hughes responded, saying that a survey done properly is expensive, and ADF&G will do it when we can find the staff time and money. Meanwhile, ADF&G will fulfill all of its responsibilities to conserve wildlife and habitat as well as maintain recreational opportunity. We don’t need emails to prove that some visitors are happy, though comments are useful in gauging what’s going on. Mark Bell said that it was good to know ADF&G’s attitude and that users need not send a lot of positive comments to prove that people are having a good time.

Jeremy said that he was asked multiple questions as the bear-viewing representative and felt torn between his guiding job and answering the question. He suggested that we set up criteria for response by the WCMC. For example, he was asked why are anglers allowed to be up front and couldn’t answer because he had clients. Peter suggested that members should be willing to answer questions.

Mark Glassmaker suggested that guidelines be posted in the cove. ADF&G staff said that virtually all private visitors were handed guidelines; that all boat storage permit-holders were given plenty of guidelines prior to the fishing/bear viewing season and asked to pass them on to clients; that

guidelines were also handed out to guides in-season; and that the guidelines were posted on ADF&G's website.

Doug said that there had been a rumor circulating that ADF&G and the WCMC gave anglers preference in the hog line. This is not true; neither ADF&G nor the WCMC has taken a position on the hog line heretofore. Wolverine Creek is public domain.

Carl also wanted to clarify that he puts 7 to 9 people on his pontoon boats, not 15 as was claimed. He and other members wondered if the ADF&G brochure should have WCMC names and phone numbers so that the public can contact them. However, the members are listed on the ADF&G website. ADF&G staff recommended against this. ADF&G will send a list of people who have either visited or have expressed interest in Wolverine Creek to the WCMC member so that they can contact the people they are meant to represent.

Mike Cowan said that it is guides' and WCMC's responsibility to answer questions. He doesn't want signs all around. He also encouraged Carl's boats to get in the hog line whenever they needed to.

Carl pointed out that counting the number and types of responses or complaints is not a valid assessment of maintenance of high-quality recreational experience. Peter asked Carl about his return customer ratio and Carl replied that his has high return ration among his overnight customers. The situation has improved at Wolverine Creek, however it is important that his clients air their issues and that the site is managed for a *high quality* recreational experience.

Tom Vania suggested that we put together a Question & Answer sheet of oft asked questions and distribute them at least to returning visitors and guides. Colleen suggested that the WCMC sent her a list of questions and together we can common responses. Committee members and alternates agreed.

5. Promote public safety

Criterion 1) Number of incidents reported that bears threatened visitors.

Number of Incidents		Assessment
2002	2003	

There was one aggressive encounter with a bear at the outhouse each of the past 2 summers. In 2003, a bear made an aggressive movement toward the MTV Jackass television crew when they were filming in the cove.

Public safety, and therefore, bear safety has improved tremendously since the early years. This is a result of people staying off the shoreline and not venturing up the creek to relieve themselves; bears no longer being food conditioned and aggressively seeking fish from people; bears not climbing into boats trying to obtain improperly stored fish; and bears not being drawn into boats by anglers playing a struggling fish.

Criterion 2) Number of incidents causing injuries and their causes.

Number of Incidents		Assessment
2002	2003	
0	0	Good; Greatly improved from early years

There were no reported injuries in the past two years. Most injuries in the past were bumps, bruises and minor cuts people suffered stumbling over the boulders or back into their boats while trying to get out of the way of a food-conditioned bear. This has not happened for the past 2 years.

There were safety concerns expressed in the past about high-speed aircraft operations in the cove and channel (step taxi, take-offs and landings). In 2002 we observed 9 incidents of this happening while this year we noted 4.

Most everyone is operating safely and this has improved from the earlier years.

WCMC Discussion

Jeremy suggested we post a weekly observation sheet of certain bears so that guides and visitors could share information about curious or food-conditioned bears. Doug concurred and Peter reminded the group to watch out that we infer liability for misbehaving bears. Doug and Colleen said that posting observations shouldn't make us liable, however they will check with the Assistant DA.

There was an email that suggested that airplanes should be parked out of the cove as a safety issue.

The group suggested that ADF&G send a letter from the WCMC to chronic offenders. This suggestion is part of an earlier agreement made about enforcement of guidelines (see May '03 meeting summary).

6. Minimize conflicts among visitors

Criterion 1) Number of reported negative encounters between users.

Number of Incidents		Assessment
2002	2003	
Unknown	Unknown	Better; Some issued resolved, others created

Though comments and complaints were discussed earlier, Joe said that we don't have a definitive number of user conflicts. We definitely see fewer conflicts due to problems created by food-conditioned bears, active displacement of bears, and shoreline pedestrians. There seem to be more conflicts over the hog line rotation. Some users feel like they are prevented from observing bears. Private visitors don't feel they have adequate access to the cove. There are also boat storage conflicts over priority use of a site, and some unauthorized use of boats.

While overall performance is better by this criterion, we need to redefine it so that it is more valid for measuring user conflicts.

WCMC Discussion

Fred said that the WCMC needs more representation from non-angling bear-viewers. Most decisions that are made are with interests of anglers involved. Colleen recommended that any imbalance on the WCMC be addressed when it is reconstituted in the fall. Peter asked if Fred would like to see the committee operate differently than on a consensus basis. Fred responded that he wanted room for a minority viewpoint to be represented.

Jeff Hughes said that Management Objective #6 is difficult to measure and to resolve. The Redoubt Bay Critical Habitat Area Management Plan demands that we maintain access for all users. So, we'll all need to address conflicts.

Mark Carr said that he's never had a problem positioning his boat to watch the bears. Perhaps one of the problems is the maneuverability of the pontoon boats. Doug said that the hog line and whether or not the pontoon boats were in it was definitely an issue in the cove last summer. Mike Cowan said that he's never had a problem with pontoon boats in the line; they are only there a couple of hours.

He and his clients are able to catch fish with pontoon boats in line. The problem is that the WCMC is not telling the guides that equal access is allowed.

Jeremy thought that bear-viewers aside from Redoubt Bay Lodge didn't have a problem with access to bear-viewing. He thought that the major problem that the pontoon boats can't move in and out to get up front for pictures. This conflict is partly due to timing: the pontoon boats come in later than all other air taxis and leave earlier. They don't have time to wait in the line. This makes them a unique user group because of the restrictions on their time and craft. The conflict is not because they're not given the same opportunity. Carl said that his 3 pontoon boats work better for the services offered by the lodge.

Carl responded that the WCMC is decidedly pro-angling and consequently, the focus of the group is fishing-driven. There has been no effort to provide access effort for non-consumptive users. It's unfortunate that the idea of buffers for the bears has been put off until spring. His main objective is to let bears have primary access to salmon. He'd like to see everybody back up. Jeff Hughes mentioned that the WCMC would talk about buffers at the spring meeting.

Doug commented that the issue of bear viewers in the hog line was not solely a Redoubt Bay Lodge problem. Doug said that, for the record, there are approximately 48 boats on the lake and some of the boats are periodically shuttled to the Kustatan River. There was also an email comment that called for resolving the hog line rotation conflicts.

Steve said that visitors have problems getting pictures without boats in them though he doesn't personally think Wolverine Creek is the place for those people. He suggested that we put a feedback form on the website.

Several members suggested that the WCMC membership include more non-fishing interests.

Report from Sport Fishery Manager

Tom Vania said that the Sport Fish Division would install a camera to count fish in May. The Division of Wildlife Conservation will maintain the camera during the summer. However, monitoring escapement is only one piece of puzzle. Sport and commercial harvest must be considered also. The optimal escapement number may not be known for years. The best harvest level won't be known for years either.

Peter asked if Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association originally created that fishery and was assured that it was wild stock. Tom added that the red salmon could be a mix of Big River Lake stocks.

Research Review

Colleen gave a very abbreviated review of the WSU research. Graduate student Troy Tollefson completed the second and final year of his data gathering and the tower was removed. Troy has forwarded some preliminary results to ADF&G, yet has done no analysis yet. He will be on hand at the spring meeting to present his results and conclusions.

Old Business

Report on Action Items from last spring

1. The lamination of guidelines was not feasible; however, they were printed on Rite-in-the-Rain paper, mailed to everyone on the public interest listed and handed out on-site to all private visitors. Boat storage permit-holders got as many copies as they requested.
2. The Management Guidelines videotape production was too expensive and time-consuming to produce at this time. If time and money become available, production is possible for the future. The

video “Staying safe in Bear Country” is HIGHLY recommended for guide training as it gives many tips regarding bear behavior.

3. ADF&G will try to have a note in the Sport Fishing Regulations giving a reference to the Management Guidelines for Wolverine Creek.
4. It is too unwieldy to organize a single guide training for all Wolverine Creek guides. However, ADF&G staff are willing to attend trainings organized by the WCMC or boat storage permit-holders.
5. Annual report forms were distributed at the beginning of the season last year, per the request of the WCMC. We’ll try to make this a habit in years to come.
6. Packets of information about the WCMC, the Critical Habitat Area, and bear behavior were given to WCMC members and boat storage permit-holders prior to the beginning of the season. We’ll try to do this again this coming spring.

Boat Storage

It is our management responsibility to minimize impact to fish and wildlife habitat by containing the boat storage area to as small an area as possible. However, boat owners have cited concerns over safety due to loading in high winds. The seasonal flooding in Big River Lake is also a problem at the current boat storage site.

ADF&G staff asked the WCMC and other users to suggest alternative storage or docking situations that would satisfy conservation concerns, safety needs, and practical realities. Commercial or private users constructing floating docks are an option. Perhaps shoreline application of geotextiles could help. Please send us your suggestions!

Following bears around the lake

Colleen said several visitors raised this concern over the years. ADF&G will draft a management objective addressing this issue. An example might be “Boats may not approach bears closer than 150 ft. while bears are outside the cove.” The management objective will be considered at the spring meeting.

Bear Viewing Platform

Colleen reviewed pros & cons for building a bear-viewing platform. Positive aspects include the following: reliable vantage point; usable by guided & unguided visitors; and reduction of crowding in cove (only if numbers of visitors are capped). Drawbacks include the following: viewers look down, not on-level with bears; platforms are very costly to construct and would demand a special appropriation; and a platform may attract more visitors and cause more crowding.

The WCMC discussed platforms and added concerns about hardening the site and changing the natural habits of the bears and visitors. Ultimately, they said that this option no longer seemed worth discussing.

New Business

Amendments to Charter

The WCMC voted to extend the charter through Fall ’04 so that we could evaluate 2 seasons of management under the current system. ADF&G will make the charter amendment.

Do Committee members have to visit Wolverine Creek each year in order to stay on the Committee?

While there was some discussion by the WCMC, there was not enough time to discuss this issue and it will be deferred to a future meeting.

Thanks and Recognition

Jeff Hughes thanked the following individuals for making things work smoother at Wolverine Creek: Mike Cowan (Alaska Wilderness Adventures); Ben Stimmel (High Adventure); Greg Vane (High Adventure); Russ Daily (High Adventure); and Ken Wingard (Talon Air).

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Wolverine Creek Management Committee will take place in Kenai at the Cook Inlet Aquaculture building on Saturday, April 3. It will be an all day meeting and a major agenda focus will be the results of the WSU study of bear interactions.

Action Items

WCMC

- ⇒ ADF&G and WCMC members will compile a list of Questions and Answers regard the management of Wolverine Creek.
- ⇒ Suggestion tabled for future discussion: limit the number of visitors by permits and/or user fees.
- ⇒ Suggestion tabled for future discussion: airplanes should be parked out of the cove as a safety issue.
- ⇒ Suggestion tabled for future discussion: Do Committee members have to visit Wolverine Creek each year in order to stay on the Committee?
- ⇒ WCMC members may organize guide trainings and request ADF&G presence.
- ⇒ WCMC members and other users should forward suggestions regarding boat storage or docking that would satisfy conservation concerns, safety needs, and practical realities.

ADF&G

- ⇒ ADF&G will circulate the “scientific” definition of food-conditioning to the committee prior to the next meeting.
- ⇒ ADF&G needs to redefine Criterion “Number of bears using Wolverine Creek” to evaluate the bears’ access fish.
- ⇒ ADF&G needs to redefine Criterion “Number of reported negative encounters between users” so that it is more valid in measuring user conflicts.
- ⇒ ADF&G will send a list of people who have either visited or have expressed interest in Wolverine Creek to the WCMC members so that they can contact the people they are meant to represent.
- ⇒ Suggestion to place a daily bear observation sheet somewhere in the cove.
- ⇒ ADF&G will try to have a note in the Sport Fishing Regulations giving a reference to the Management Guidelines for Wolverine Creek.
- ⇒ Annual report forms will be distributed at the beginning of the season
- ⇒ Packets of information about the WCMC, the Critical Habitat Area, and bear behavior will be distributed to WCMC members and boat storage permit-holders prior to the beginning of the season.
- ⇒ ADF&G will make the charter amendment extend the charter through Fall ’04 so that we could evaluate 2 seasons of management under the current system.