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From: Susan Mansfield [mailto:sue.mansfield@verizon.net]

Sent: Sunday, December 16, 2007 2:41 PM

To: 'michael.doncarlos@dnr.state.mn.us'

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Subject: Eagles Nest Township bear situation - Solo and cubs

December 16, 2007

Michael W. DonCarlos
Wildlife Research and Policy Manager
Minnesota Department of Resources

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you in regards to the MN DNR decision to kill Solo the bear and possibly her cubs. I apologize in advance for the length of this letter; however, this is a serious matter.

I am a graduate student in the Conservation Biology program of the Environmental Studies Department at Antioch University New England. My master's thesis, *Effects of supplemental food on weights and reproductive success of black bears in northeastern Minnesota*, is in the final stage of editing.

My research has been conducted over the past four summers through the Wildlife Research Institute (WRI) under the direction of Lynn Rogers, Ph.D., and I plan to continue working for the WRI as a field researcher. I am familiar with Solo through my field work and know her to be a very calm, mellow bear – perhaps the gentlest bear I've seen. On two occasions I have had the opportunity to accompany her briefly as she foraged and meandered in her territory; once in 2006 as she foraged for ant pupae and then played with a stick as she frolicked in a beaver pond, and once in 2007 as she fed on the remains of a deer fawn and then nursed her cubs.

I worked with the Eagles Nest Community Bear Committee (CBC) during its first few meetings to provide them with background information on basic bear biology and the WRI research bears in particular. As a result, they are more educated in bear biology and behavior and therefore better able to make decisions on the bear issues. I will not reiterate the findings of the CBC. Suffice it to say a plan was outlined to deal with unwelcome bears, and plans are in the works to make Solo feel unwelcome on the Walsh Road isthmus next spring.

I implore you to reconsider the decision to kill Solo and to allow the decisions of the CBC to be put to the test. Killing Solo goes against stated MN DNR policy to only kill a bear if all other measures have failed. In Solo's case nothing else has even been tried.

Once family breakup occurs in the spring, Solo will be roaming widely as she searches for mates and possible new areas to expand her territory into. Her territory will be in flux and it will be the ideal time to ensure she and her yearling offspring are made to feel very unwelcome in the residential areas in question. She is a young bear and as such may be easier to train. Her cubs will initially be very skittish after breakup – a perfect time to make them feel unwelcome.

Hazing her out of the Walsh Road area will only work if residents there stop the activities that are attracting bears to the area. I conducted extensive radio-tracking of WRI research bears in 2004 – 2005; locating all research bears nearly every day. During those two years I never located one on Walsh Road. It was not until the summer of 2006 that 2 WRI collared bears began making occasional forays onto the Walsh Road isthmus. I am left to believe something changed on the isthmus that summer; a food supply of some sort became available to them that had not been there previously.

The issue of ‘feeding’ is one the CBC considered very seriously. The committee came up with some strong recommendations about feeding, but the DNR has not acknowledged the fact bears are being drawn onto the isthmus by deliberate or inadvertent feeding. The DNR is simply pointing the finger of blame for Solo’s behavior at Lynn Rogers and his research.

I understand Lynn Rogers' innovative methods are considered controversial to some, and certain people within the DNR have long tried to scuttle his research. However, no one anywhere understands black bear behavior better than he does. His insatiable curiosity and creativity have furthered the understanding of black bears beyond anything previously possible. We continue to learn things about bears that could not be learned from older research methods, many of which Lynn also pioneered. Lynn has dedicated his life to sharing his findings with the public. He currently reaches over a hundred million people each year through the media, lectures, traveling museum exhibits, the Internet, and now through the North American Bear Center. Lynn’s research has broad support within the region. The Eagles Nest Town board, the Ely Chamber of Commerce, and the Ely Area Development Association all recognize the value of his research.

Wildlife Manager Tom Rusch represented the MN DNR at the CBC meetings. His statements to the committee, some relayed from David Garshelis, and his handout of recommendations, clearly showed the issue is about more than Solo. The CBC picked up on the tensions and strongly recommended “a higher level of cooperation between the DNR and WRI.” The CBC wants professionals to work together for the good of the bears and the citizens of the community. I know this is Lynn's desire, and I am more than willing to do whatever I can toward that end.

Again, I implore you to reconsider the decision to kill Solo. We still have much to learn from her.

As a young cub Solo lost an ear when she was attacked by another bear. Her brother was killed in the same incident. Solo was often by her mother Blackheart’s side that summer,

while her sister roamed and foraged a short distance away. Just prior to family breakup the following spring we noticed a change in Solo's behavior. She became more fearful and often hung back. We have long pondered this change in behavior and wonder if it was because large males were around showing interest in her mother. Soon after family breakup in 2005, Sunshine headed north to the edge of the Boundary Waters, while Solo remained in the Eagles Nest Area. Early that fall, Blackheart was killed near her usual denning area south of Armstrong Lake.

In 2006, Solo took over Blackheart's territory. However, Solo preferred to remain in the residential portions of the territory, perhaps because with her impaired directional hearing she felt safer around non-threatening humans than around other bears. For two summers, some Eagles Nest residents welcomed Solo's visits, others simply admired her as she passed through, and a few backed away in fear. However, it seems no one made a consistent effort to discourage her visits. As a result of the interest generated by the Community Bear Committee, there are now people in the community committed to discouraging Solo's unwanted visits.

This coming summer we hope to learn if it is possible to alter Solo's territory through aversive conditioning. As females, Solo's cubs will be in competition with each other for territory, and we want to collar them to monitor their movements in relation to each other and to Solo after family breakup. Will they both choose to stay within Solo's territory or will one move out? In which direction will Solo's territory expand to accommodate her daughters? We have not had a litter with two females since Solo and Sunshine were born in 2004. This is an opportunity to further the understanding of kinship and land tenure systems.

If Solo is killed we all lose. A community, which has come together over a contentious issue and reached consensus, loses faith in the democratic process. The Wildlife Research Institute, which has followed this bear for 4 years, loses research opportunities that could benefit bear management in an area of bear biology that has been little studied. And the DNR, which will be going against its own stated policy, loses credibility in the eyes of the public.

Once again, I implore you to reconsider the decision to kill Solo. We all have so much to lose.

This decision was made unilaterally, without input from those who know Solo best.

Sincerely,

Sue Mansfield, MS candidate
Antioch University New England

Field Researcher
Wildlife Research Institute