

Four recommendations from the Wildlife Research Institute regarding Solo

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Abstract:

This report includes four recommendations for dealing with Solo and her cubs. Solo is an important issue to a lot of people, especially within the Eagles Nest Community which has developed recommendations accepted by the Town Board for handling bear problems. We all recognize that managing Minnesota's resources is a huge job and that Minnesota can be proud of its bear management. However, in the case of Solo, decision-makers acted on inaccurate information. Here are 4 recommendations from the Wildlife Research Institute, followed by information to clear up misconceptions. Solo has never been aggressive, has never hurt anyone, and has done only minor property damage. This report includes an interview with Jim Fischer (page 4), the person the DNR claims was pushed by Solo. It includes material from across America (page 7) to evaluate DNR claims that Solo presents an unusual risk of injury, which the evidence clearly indicates she does not. There is nothing to suggest she is a liability problem or a threat to the public. Solo can be left in place and provide valuable research information on how rural communities can prevent nuisance problems and coexist with black bears.

Recommendation 1 – Follow Eagles Nest Township's community consensus plan for dealing with "problem" bears. At the suggestion of DNR Wildlife Manager Tom Rusch, who participated in several of the meetings, Eagles Nest Township established a 14-member Community Bear Committee (CBC) to develop a plan for dealing with local bear problems. The CBC spent months obtaining information from bear experts across the country and developing a plan entitled "Living with Bears in Eagles Nest Township: A Plan for Coexisting with Wildlife in a Natural Setting." This is a community that appreciates wildlife and prefers to coexist with it. The Town Board unanimously accepted the plan. The DNR ignored the plan and created a community crisis by deciding to remove Solo and her cubs in a rush to judgment based on inaccurate information. The DNR cites a meeting between Solo and Jim Fischer as reason to more her, but Jim told me a different story (see Jim Fischer's story, page 4).

The CBC plan includes:

1. **Communication** – *establish effective communication within the township to avoid the rumors which distort and escalate issues within the community.*
2. **Bear Help Line** – *a group of trained volunteers available to assist residents with unwelcome bears. Assistance may range from simple advice on removing attractants to actual aversive conditioning of unwelcome bears.*
3. **Bear Council** – *comprised of 3 members to deal with complaints and coordinate communication with the DNR and local bear research (WRI). The Council would play a role in making decisions concerning "bad" or "rogue" bears.*
4. **Inter-Agency Cooperation** – *encourage a higher level of cooperation between the DNR, WRI, and Eagles Nest Township to the benefit of all concerned.*

5. **Bear 101** – *conduct a series of classes on black bears to provide factual data and answer questions. Topics include bear behavior and ecology, meanings of bear vocalizations and body language, how to live with bears, and how to deter bears.*

The CBC also developed a comprehensive list of behaviors to classify a problem bear as a habituated bear, nuisance bear, or ‘bad’ bear. The committee agreed that ‘bad’ bears need to be destroyed. A ‘bad’ bear is defined as a bear that:

- manifests a threat to human/pet safety by aggressive behavior
- breaks into and enters buildings
- is not invited by attractants
- repeatedly manifests this behavior

Solo and her cubs do not qualify for removal under the Eagles Nest Township plan.

Recommendation 2 – Follow the recommendations on the Minnesota DNR website under Living With Bears.

1. The DNR website section on Homes and Cabins states in part “*To minimize bear problems on your property...remove bird feeders in the spring...keep pet food inside...keep barbecue grills and picnic tables clean*” and “*Learn to tolerate bears. Many bears are killed or injured when not causing problems.*”

In Solo’s case, the DNR did not follow any of these recommendations. With the numerous bird feeders along Walsh Road attracting bears, the obvious remedy would be to reduce the attractants. The DNR has not allowed the Eagles Nest CBC to implement their plan which would add weight to the DNR’s own stated recommendations.

Concerned community members are ready to reduce attractants and use aversive conditioning methods to save Solo but are not being given the chance.

2. The DNR website section on Relocating or Destroying Bears states in part “*Sometimes a bear causing problems must be relocated or destroyed. These methods should be used only after exhausting all other options. ... Bears will not be relocated for causing minor property damage such as tearing down bird feeders or tipping over garbage cans. ...A person may kill a bear to protect their property, however this option should be used only if the bear is causing immediate danger or significant property damage.*”

In Solo’s case the DNR has not exhausted, or even tried, any other options. The DNR made killing Solo their first choice rather than a last resort (see more in Background below) even though she does not fit DNR criteria for removal. Solo has never been aggressive, has never threatened or hurt anyone, and has never caused significant property damage. No one has ever been in immediate danger from this bear, and there is no danger while she hibernates.

The Minnesota DNR’s decision to remove Solo is inconsistent with their stated policy. Solo does not qualify for removal according to the Minnesota DNR’s own policies.

Recommendation 3 – Do not kill or relocate Solo. Chase her out from under the cabin if the owner demands it. Members of the Eagles Nest Bear Help Line can do that and keep

her out. Solo will move to another den within her territory. Alternatively, the owner desires to sell the cabin, and we know someone who would be interested in buying it and leaving the bears in place. In spring, remove attractants where Solo is unwelcome. People who thought they could feed birds and not attract other wildlife now realize it is necessary to remove attractants. The Community Bear Help Line will provide advice and assistance in aversively conditioning Solo and her cubs where they are unwelcome. They will distribute another 100 cans of pepper spray donated by community members. Classes will be taught in spring and summer on living with bears. The community is coming together around Solo. Removing her without removing attractants only opens the door for another bear to move in. *Further, based on my 40 years of research experience and the information presented below under “Is Solo likely to hurt someone?” Solo is not a liability risk for the DNR. She has never harmed anyone, has never threatened anyone, and has done only minor property damage. She is a wild animal that trusts people. That trust can be changed through aversive conditioning (see Background below).*

Solo and her cubs have done nothing to merit being killed or confined in captivity. We recognize that dealing with landowners’ fears is a difficult job for the DNR, but removing a bear like Solo is unnecessary. Education is a better solution, along with aversive conditioning and attractant management. While we appreciate efforts by Representative Dill and others to save Solo’s life, life in captivity is not the answer. For example, Bear Country USA, in Rapid City, SD, is a commercial enterprise where Solo and her two female cubs will produce cubs for sale (unless they are put on birth control) and be running from wolves confined with them for the rest of their 30 years of life, when they have done nothing to merit taking them from the wild (see below).

Recommendation 4 – Work with WRI bear researchers and Eagles Nest Township to obtain scientific data on the success of methods applied to Solo and her cubs in 2008. If Solo is left within her territory she has the potential of providing research data important to urban bear management. This is one of the least studied areas of bear biology despite its importance to management. Without such information, wildlife managers across America will continue killing bears like Solo. If she is relocated, we learn nothing – except which new bear takes over her territory and continues to raid the bird feeders and likely will be less calm and predictable than Solo. This is an area in need of research, as recommended by Spencer et al. (2007) in the journal *Ursus* 18(2):217-229 (2007) to enable agencies to move forward with improved knowledge in an adaptive management framework. It is difficult to understand why the DNR did not seek input and information from researchers and the Chairman of the Community Bear Committee in making decisions about Solo.

The most recent issue of *Ursus*, the scientific journal of bear research and management, describes a system for alerting people when a radio-collared bear approaches an area considered off limits (“An automated system for detecting and reporting trespassing bears in Yosemite National Park” by Breck et al. 2007. *Ursus* 18(2):230-235) This is something further that could be explored with the Eagles Nest Community and researchers, considering the narrow isthmus between two lakes where people have complained about Solo. The equipment is manufactured by Advanced Telemetry Systems in Isanti, Minnesota.

Situation Background

When the Minnesota DNR received complaints about Solo's activities in Eagles Nest Township, Wildlife Manager Tom Rusch recommended the Town Board take up the issue. The community took on the challenge of resolving bear issues at the local level. Township Chairman Dan Humay headed a 14-member Community Bear Committee. The committee spent months overcoming divisiveness within the community and developing a consensus plan. As the committee worked past rumors and exaggerations, the vast majority of the community did not want Solo and her cubs removed. The committee developed a plan for working with residents, researchers, and the DNR to deal with any bear situation in the township. The plan could be a model for many rural communities.

The DNR disregarded the community, its plan, Chairman Dan Humay, local bear researchers, and anyone truly familiar with Solo. The DNR decided to remove Solo and her cubs without even looking at the plan, creating a community crisis. Further, the DNR based its decision on false information (see Jim Fischer's story).

Jim Fischer's Story

The DNR characterized Solo as "aggressive," claiming she "pushed" Jim Fischer and therefore must be killed. Here is Jim's story as told to me on December 21, 2007.

Jim is a brother-in-law of the owner of the cabin where Solo is hibernating. The cabin where this takes place is in a line of cabins with many bird feeders and a mix of people who enjoyed Solo while others complained.

Jim said that the past spring (2007) when he was bending over putting in a dock he felt a touch. He thought it was the dog from across the street and yelled at it to go home. He felt a second nudge from Solo's nose and looked around. He said he had never been close to a bear before and "it scared the crap out of me," and doubly so because Jim can't move quickly with three fused vertebrae. But Solo was calm and non-aggressive. Jim gathered his tools, walked to his vehicle, and got in. Solo followed, making Jim wonder "what the bear was up to." He rolled down the window and hollered at Solo to go away. Solo sat down and listened—body language that says I mean no harm. She left shortly. Jim resumed working on the dock. Later, Solo reappeared from a different direction. Jim got in his vehicle again while she passed through. Some time later, Solo passed through again—this time with her cubs. Jim had heard the old concern about mothers with cubs, so he got in his vehicle and drove to Tower for coffee. When he returned, Solo was gone. *Jim said he was scared at the time, but, in retrospect, Solo was completely non-aggressive.*

To put Jim's experience in perspective, most people who see bears close-up are fearful, having seen outdoor magazine covers, taxidermy with unnatural snarls, and warnings written by government officials worried about liability problems. Solo was comfortable because she had seen only the friendly face of humanity. Many residents had hand-fed her and sat with her and the cubs. This was long before August 2007, so people had not yet begun to be aggressive toward her. Solo's trust does not make her a danger or a

liability as is detailed below (see page 6, *Is Solo likely to hurt someone?*). She could easily be made less trusting if residents were aggressive toward her, using pepper spray and other deterrents according to the township plan mentioned above. In fact, people saw increased wariness in Solo after mid-August 2007 when researchers handed out nearly 100 cans of pepper spray and encouraged residents to spray her. People saw her timid reactions to the pepper spray. They saw her become hesitant and wary around people. To many, Solo was no longer the fearsome bear of their imagination. She was the timid bear of reality—a bear assessing whether a person was carrying pepper spray and behaving in an aggressive manner. Fearful people began to realize that people can be in control by removing attractants, being aggressive, and using deterrents. Most people did not want her removed.

Rush to Judgment

With all the bird feeders Solo visited, members of the Eagles Nest CBC were puzzled on August 15, 2007, when local DNR Wildlife Manager Tom Rusch made recommendations that did not include removing them. Instead, his recommendations of that date, before the committee could even learn the full story about Solo, were to remove Solo from the population within 30 days and phase out bear research. The committee wondered why he would make those recommendations and why he had earlier done a very unusual thing. He had actively solicited bear complaints in Eagles Nest Township, and only that township, while concealing from WRI researchers that Solo was a problem to some there. This prevented researchers from working with residents to remedy the situation and gather data on the effectiveness of the various methods used. Further, when township chairman Dan Humay contacted Tom's supervisor, Jeff Lightfoot, in fall 2007, Jeff was aware that Tom wanted a bear killed in Eagles Nest Township but was totally unaware of the huge community effort to deal with the situation and create a plan at Tom's suggestion. When the plan was completed, which did not call for Solo to be removed, the committee wondered why Tom did not pass it up the line. The DNR went on to claim the encounter between Jim Fischer and Solo was an example of aggression and had dangerous portent, which is different from what Jim told me.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the chances of changing Solo's behavior and living area? Excellent. Change has already begun using 'a carrot and stick' approach. The 'carrot' is diversionary food placed where people have been feeding bears for years without problems. The 'stick' includes making Solo feel unwelcome in problem areas by removing bird feeders and using aggressive behavior, pepper spray, and other deterrents.

Did researchers cause Solo to become accustomed to people and seek out bird feeders along Walsh Road? No. Researchers have had very little to do with Solo.

Here is her story as learned from telemetry data and observations by residents.

In January 2004, Blackheart gave birth to a male and two females. In May, the male cub was killed by an adult male that also tore the ear off one of the females. As the two females grew up, they demonstrated such calm and trusting personalities that people

named one of them Sunshine. Solo got her name from having only one ear. The family fed mostly on natural foods and occasionally visited houses that have maintained bear feeding stations for years. The bears were no trouble.

In May 2005, Blackheart separated from the two yearlings to mate. Later that summer, Sunshine left Blackheart's territory and its feeding stations. She settled in an area with very few people along the edge of the BWCA. Solo remained within her mother's territory as is more typical of young females. She seldom visited the Research Center, preferring to forage on natural foods and at other feeding stations. Radio-collars placed on her at those feeding stations were often shortly removed by Solo. Her missing ear made that fairly easy. Consequently, only intermittent information was obtained on her movements. Blackheart was killed by a hunter in the fall of 2005.

In 2006, Solo took over Blackheart's vacant territory and discovered the adjacent residential area with its many feeders and accommodating residents. Blackheart had never taken her there. Solo discovered a bonanza. There were many bird feeders easily reachable on decks. No one chased her, and there was little competition from other bears. She became comfortable seeing people. She learned the location of each bird feeder and routinely checked them. Finding bird feeders on decks was new to her because she had not been allowed on the decks at the primary feeding stations in her usual territory.

Many people on Walsh Road enjoyed seeing Solo. A few feared her and complained. Some of the complainers were newcomers who felt they should be able to feed birds without having unwanted coyotes and bears come into their yards. They watched Solo from a distance or from inside their cabins. People who dared to approach her were friendly and non-aggressive.

In January 2007, Solo gave birth to 2 female cubs in her usual territory. A pack of wolves moved into the heart of her territory, especially around the area where residents maintained bear feeding stations. Solo shifted to Walsh Road where her cubs were safe from wolves and other bears. She did not yet consider people a threat there because people were not yet aggressive and pepper spray had not yet been used. Researchers were not yet aware of the complaints about her. One cabin owner told of a bear getting his bird feeder in spring 2007, but the DNR had not shared its information about Solo. Solo was not a bear researchers could walk with because she was often on private property. Researchers learned that some people considered Solo a problem in late July 2007.

In mid-August 2007, about the time Eagles Nest Township held a town meeting about her, the wolves moved on, making her old territory safe for cubs again. At the same time, people began using the pepper spray that had been handed out free at the meeting. Solo shifted her activities away from Walsh road and back to her usual territory. There, she ate mostly natural vegetation and visited feeding stations where she was welcome. Solo's sudden absence from the Walsh Road after the public meeting made residents there wonder what researchers had done to expel her. They didn't realize how little researchers had to do with this bears. The rumor mill wrongly blamed researchers for problems with Solo and then they wrongly credited researchers for her change in behavior. They assumed that researchers influenced her behavior because they saw the radio-collar, and

rumors had taken over from there. In the fall Solo returned to the safety of Walsh Road to hibernate under the unoccupied cabin. The events after that have been in the news.

Is Solo likely to hurt someone? No. Here are my reasons for saying that.

1. In the 61 killings by black bears across North America in the last 107 years, none were by trusting bears like Solo. Three quarters of the killings were in remote parts of Canada and Alaska where bears have the least contact with people. Only 3 of the 61 killings were in the eastern states where bears have by far the most contact with people (2 killings in Tennessee and 1 in New York). In North America, for each person killed by a black bear, dogs kill about 45 people, bees kill about 120, lightning kills about 249, and people kill about 60,000 (including homicides only). Put another way, one black bear out of about a million kills someone, one grizzly bear out of about 50,000 kills someone, and one person out of about 18,000 North Americans murders someone.
2. Despite my working very closely with bears over the last 40 years, I have never had any black bear come after me and hurt me. I have never found a way to reliably trigger black bears to bite other than attacking them, and then they mainly want to get away.
3. Researchers in Minnesota and Michigan, and over a hundred volunteers, have spent decades walking with wild black bears, including mothers with cubs, to obtain data without a serious injury. The book “Walking With Bears” by Dr. Terry DeBruyn describes his experiences. The scientific publication “How to obtain behavioral and ecological data from free-ranging, researcher-habituated black bears” by Lynn Rogers and Gregory Wilker (1990 *Ursus* 8:321-327) describes this research method. 38 video exhibits at the North American Bear Center show the undisturbed behavior and scientific insights obtain by graduate student Sue Mansfield accompanying these bears—usually alone and far from roads. Now the DNR has decided to kill such a bear when it has harmed no one and caused no more than minor property damage, mostly to bird feeders that should not be up and attracting bears in the first place.
4. In the Eagles Nest area, over the past 40 years, up to a dozen residences have maintained bear feeding sites per year. Dozens of trusting bears like Solo have lived in the area without a mishap.
5. Similarly, in a gated Pennsylvania community called Hemlock Farms, people maintained feeding troughs for bears and became familiar with the bears. According to Dr. Gary Alt, over 3 bears per square mile coexisted with a thousand people per square mile for decades. People hand-fed the bears and occasionally invited neighborhood favorites into their homes without injury. Three bears per square mile is a higher bear density there is found in any national park or forest.
6. Similarly, at McNeil River Falls in Alaska, people have closely observed grizzly/brown bears since the McNeil River Sanctuary was established in 1967. The bears have lost their fear of people to the extent that mothers nurse cubs only a few feet away from people sitting on the ground in a viewing area with no barrier between them. In this state-sanctioned operation, people walk among the bears while traveling between the viewing area and the camping area. The camping area is also among the bears. According to biologist/guide Derek Stonorov, no one has been hurt.

7. At the Vince Shute Wildlife Sanctuary near Orr, MN, people mingled with, petted, and hand-fed dozens of black bears for decades without serious injury. In the decades before the viewing platform was built, there were no rules. The public mingled with dozens of bears in the main feeding area or back in the woods. In some years, over 80 bears were seen at a time. Researchers observed interactions with huge trepidation while 500-pound bears looked for handouts and while toddlers walked among those bears, sometimes steadying themselves against huge wild bears (photos available). People teased bears with food for pictures. People lifted young children up to bears' mouths for reasons that are not totally understandable (photographs available). Over the years, thousands of contacts between the public and hundreds of wild bears produced no attacks and few minor injuries despite the fact that the bears ranged from trusting experienced bears to defensive newcomers.
8. In Smoky Mountains National Park, Dr. Jane Tate did her Ph.D. project on human-bear interactions. She studied human behavior around panhandling, roadside bears. She studied bear responses to people. She went into the study believing habituated bears were aggressive, unpredictable, and dangerous because that is what she had heard. She recalls watching in disbelief as people poured beer on bears' heads, put honey on babies' faces, hand-fed bears, and crowded around bears laughing and screaming. To her surprise, the results were a few minor injuries. She found the bears to be tolerant and "amazingly restrained." She said bear personalities differed, and bears new to human contact were the most likely to become nervous and defensive. Bears that were accustomed to people were the least likely to injure people, and they served to keep other bears away. She said that in her professional experience there is no reason to remove a calm, trusting bear like Solo.

Is it abnormal for a wild bear to be comfortable with people? No. The examples above address that. Abnormal is a subjective term based on individual opinions about how bears should behave. Bears have individual personalities and are intelligent animals whose reactions to people are based more on learning than instinct. Where bears see only the friendly faces of people, as was the case along Walsh Road until August 2007, they learn to be comfortable around people in certain situations and locations rather than wasting energy fleeing unnecessarily.

If a bear that is comfortable around people sees someone in the woods, will it approach? Very unlikely. Such interactions tend to be location specific. Bears that tolerate petting and hand-feeding in one location are often wary and unapproachable in other areas. For example, many of the research bears are very tolerant where they expect to see people but are unapproachable in the woods. Bears that have learned to allow researchers to accompany them, run from hikers they encounter even while being accompanied by a researcher.

But what about Tim Treadwell? Tim Treadwell spent 13 summers mingling with brown/grizzly bears, including mothers with cubs. He walked with them, touched them, and watched them mate, fight, and forage. During the same period, thousands of visitors to Katmai National Park walked among the same bears without harm. I personally led many trips to the area and walked among the same bears without the slightest problem.

Guides and researchers like myself realize, of course, there are limits in dealing with these powerful animals, depending upon individual bear personalities. For example, although a person can usually push a grizzly off of food, there is some risk with that, which is how Tim Treadwell got killed. He was killed when he tried to chase the wrong grizzly away from his food cache at a time of year when food was scarce. No one knows whether the bear was familiar with people or was a newcomer from the interior because of the poor salmon run that year. His girlfriend was killed as she repeatedly struck the bear with a fry pan.

The DNR 'errs on the side of public safety'. Does that make sense? It depends upon how far they err. Managing to prevent a one in a million occurrence does not make sense when the preponderance of data indicates that a bear like Solo is not a danger. There is no liability problem with Solo, given the accumulation of data we now have on bears accustomed to people. Erring too far toward public safety is a holdover from when fear of bears led to extermination campaigns. We know much more than that today, especially in Eagles Nest Township where people are familiar with bears and the vast majority does not want Solo removed.

Why are people so afraid of black bears? Partly fear of the unknown, partly primal fear of animals with large pointed teeth, and largely because bears have been demonized in outdoor magazines, movie fiction, taxidermy showing unnatural snarls, and government warnings based on fear of liability problems. There is a world of excessive fear about black bears that will take a huge amount of time, research, and education to overcome. Management based on that fear is not based on science. The DNR has total power to manage, but I would invite decision-makers to visit the Eagles Nest Research Project and see first-hand, for the first time, what bears are like, for more informed decisions.

Does feeding bears create problems? It depends upon where and how the feeding is done. This is another area of major misconception. The bear-human interface, including feeding, is one of the least studied areas of bear biology. Most statements about feeding are based on supposition rather than science. As studies are done, most of the old statements are turning out to be wrong. Feeding bears in campgrounds and where they are unwelcome creates problems. But diversionary feeding around rural communities can reduce nuisance problems according to a growing body of evidence. Bears have been fed in Eagles Nest Township for over 40 years, beginning back in the 1960's when Ed Orazem began feeding bears on Armstrong Lake during a poor food year. By the time I began studying the community and its bears in the late 1990's, a dozen residences were feeding bears. During all those decades, not one nuisance complaint was registered with the DNR until 2006 (Solo). Diversionary feeding acted as a buffer against nuisance activity in years and seasons when berries and hazelnuts were scarce. Instead of breaking into houses or going from house to house looking for scraps, the bears of Eagles Nest Township had a dozen residences where they were welcome to eat. Neighbors saw few bears and registered no complaints. Diversionary feeding has been successful elsewhere in North America, too. Many of the misconceptions about feeding bears are contained in a DNR document that Tom Rusch handed out in an Eagles Nest Committee meeting. The attached "Common Beliefs versus Science" addressed those misconceptions.

Why are so many residents of Eagles Nest Township passionately opposed to the DNR coming in and removing Solo? Residents of Eagles Nest realize the public statements being made by the DNR about the danger from Solo are wrong. They know this bear. The DNR doesn't. The community came together to create "Living with Bears in Eagles Nest Township: A Plan for Coexisting with Wildlife in a Natural Setting," and the DNR disregarded it.

Common Beliefs vs. Science

Residents of Eagles Nest Township have fed bears for over 40 years. Supplemental feeding is one of the least studied areas of bear biology despite its importance to management. A major purpose of Wildlife Research Institute studies is to document the effects of this feeding to provide scientific data for use in wildlife management decisions. WRI is studying a clan of bears descended from a female that had access to supplemental food since she was a cub in 1990. Aspects of the study include ecology, reproduction, social organization, land-tenure, bear-human relationships, and how knowledge is passed from generation to generation. The study compares Eagles Nest bears to nearby bears with little access to supplemental food. The study is beginning to answer questions not been addressed anywhere elsewhere in the world. Many commonly held beliefs about feeding bears – such as those stated in "Be a Good Neighbor – Don't Feed the Bears!" handed out to the Eagles Nest Community Bear Committee by DNR Wildlife Manager, Tom Rusch – are not based on science. The Wildlife Research Institute is working to provide the 'science' that will confirm or refute these beliefs.

WRI does not advocate feeding bears. It is documenting results of feeding that has gone on for decades here. It also does not advocate dissemination of opinion as fact. Let's look at "Be a Good Neighbor – Don't Feed the Bears!" item by item. The sentences in quotes are from the handout. The bullets are results of research.

"Supplemental feeding is not necessary for bears. They survive well on natural foods."

- In good food years, black bears do survive well on natural foods.
- In poor food years, many cubs and yearlings starve to death.
- In poor food years, hunger drives some bears to human food sources where they are killed by landowners. Some are gut-shot to die slow, inhumane, and wasteful deaths. Studies are showing a better way.
- A growing body of data from across North America suggests that supplemental/diversionary feeding helps prevent problems around rural communities. Where there is diversionary food for hungry bears to turn to, reducing attractants and using aversive conditioning are more effective in reducing nuisance problems.

"Bears prefer natural food, but foods that people feed are more concentrated and easier to obtain – making for lazy, dependent bears."

- Black bears do prefer natural foods and do not become lazy, dependent bears. They abandon supplemental food and forage for natural foods when natural foods are available.

- Anyone who thinks a fed bear is lazy should try following one around for a day! (See the attached description and map of a 14-hour walk with a bear that could have been feeding on supplemental food.)

“Feeding is simply for human entertainment, not for the health of the bears.”

- In many cases feeding bears is for human entertainment, as is feeding of deer, birds, or any other wildlife. People enjoy viewing wildlife.
- Wildlife Research Institute feeds bears for research. Careful records are kept of bear visits, weights, social interactions, and activities around and away from feeding stations.
- Feeding enables researchers to establish the trust needed to collar bears without drugs, adjust collars for growth, and walk with bears to obtain detailed observations of activities and food choices.
- Feeding, whether for entertainment or to divert bears from unwelcome sites, can reduce nuisance problems depending upon how and where the feeding is done.

“Bears get unnaturally fat when feeding on human foods.”

- What is ‘unnaturally fat’ for a bear? Bears are built to gain and lose huge amounts of weight over the course of a year. In captivity, obese bears set longevity records.
- Weight gain is a topic of WRI research. WRI has obtained more weights on free-ranging wild black bears than any other bear study in the world. Nothing in the data suggests any harmful effects from supplementary human foods on wild bears.
- Only two bears (both pregnant females) in the study area might be considered “obese” but their good health is evidenced by their reproductive success and longevity. Neither was a member of the Eagles Nest clan.

“Even if the bear you’re feeding does not damage your property, it may create nuisance problems and cause property damage at your neighbor’s home.”

- Data from Alaska, Montana, Colorado, Wisconsin, British Columbia, Michigan, and Minnesota show that hungry, emaciated bears (not fed bears) are the ones most likely to be nuisances, damage property, break into houses, and cause problems in campgrounds.
- Supplementary feeding sites are just another source of food to bears—along with natural feeding areas—but the reliability of supplementary food can become important in years of scarce natural food and keep bears from being desperate enough to cause serious nuisance problems like house break-ins.
- House break-ins are most common where natural food is scarce and there is no diversionary food to turn to. The desperately hungry bears then go for the only food there is—inside houses. There are no desperate bears in Eagles Nest Township.

“Feeding Bears = Tame Bears. A tame bear’s inherent wildness is compromised by feeding, making it unwary of people. This results in more unwanted human-bear encounters, which overall reduces the value, appreciation and tolerance of bears by the general public.”

- This statement includes many topics. All are opinions unsupported by objective data and linked together by unsupported assumptions. Discussing each adequately would take more space than this summary can include.
- “Inherent wildness” is a nebulous term. Opinions vary about what constitutes wildness. Bear personalities vary from trusting to wary. Bears are intelligent animals whose behavior depends more upon learning than instinct. Learning is driven to some extent by hunger. Hungry bears with trusting personalities quickly learn to trust people who do not harass them at feeding sites around homes, and this occurs whether or not they were previously fed. Bears are like big chipmunks in that hunger can drive them to overcome fear.
- Although fed bears learn to trust people at feeding locations, most run from people out in the woods where people are not expected.
- Eagles Nest Township residents have intentionally fed bears for over 40 years. DNR records for the township show an unusually low number of unwanted human-bear encounters over those decades. In the last two years, two bears with trusting personalities found an abundance of bird feeders, deer feeders, cultivated fruits, and natural fruits in the residential area where people did not harass them. This happens across the country whether or not bears are fed. In fact, it is particularly common where bears are not fed. For example, in a nearby community where bears were not fed, 1 of 9 households killed a “nuisance” bear each year during an 8-year study.
- In Eagles Nest Township, with the two exceptions, the resident bears are seldom seen and cause little trouble, year after year, whether natural food is abundant or scarce.
- Problems can arise when people mistakenly believe that “Feeding bears=Tame bears” and treat a wild bear like a tame pet.
- Where bears are fed, neighbors commonly come over, meet the bears, and overcome misconceptions. For many, meeting real bears is a life-changing experience that enables them to enjoy the woods and all its inhabitants without fear.
- The bears of Eagles Nest Township provide educational opportunities for wildlife professionals and the general public through field study courses, media coverage, and the North American Bear Center – all of which increase appreciation, respect, and tolerance of the bears.

“Too many bears concentrated in one area can create a multitude of problems including threat to humans, bodily injury, property damage, car kills, and vulnerability to illegal killing.”

- “Too many bears concentrated in one area?” Wasn’t the bear population issue covered at a previous meeting? Tom Rusch presented DNR population estimates suggesting 24 bears per township, which is right in line with WRI’s estimate of bear numbers in Eagles Nest Township, including cubs.
- “Threat to humans, bodily injury” It is well known that bears pose very little threat to humans, and it is disturbing that DNR officials continue to portray bears as great danger.
- “Car kills” Bears can be killed by vehicles if they are induced to cross highways to feeding areas. However, bears routinely cross roads and occasionally get killed

whether or not they have access to supplemental food. Two bears were killed by vehicles in Eagles Nest Township in 8 years of study (2000-2007). Both were over a mile from feeding areas.

- “Vulnerability to illegal killing.” Bears are illegally killed throughout their range. In Eagles Nest Township, after four decades of feeding, most people are more tolerant and knowledgeable about bears than people elsewhere.
- People often add to this list of suspected problems increased transmission of disease and increased aggression among the bears, but no diseases have been identified to be such a problem in black bears, and potential problems of aggression are worked out within the hierarchy without serious injury.

“Feeding often lures bears to areas where hunting is not allowed. Wildlife agencies rely on regulated hunting to thin out populations to reduce potential bear-human conflicts.”

- When hunters distribute literally tons of bait in the woods, most bears are drawn away from diversionary feeding stations until the hunters stop baiting a month or so later. Hunters’ baits are a major source of supplemental food each year. Even if the hunters’ baits are of lower quality food than are available at the feeding stations, many of the bears seem to prefer the scattered baits.
- 4 collared bears and many non-collared bears with access to supplemental food have been killed over bait in Eagles Nest Township since 2000.

“Black Bears have lived for eons in Northern Minnesota habitats without supplemental feeding. In fact, today’s northern forests, with an interspersed diversity of types and ages, produce more natural bear foods than they did in the past.” Lou Cornicelli, DNR Big Game Program Consultant

- Today’s forests likely do produce more natural bear foods than they did in the past, which increases bears’ reproductive rate and population growth.
- However, feeding has occurred as long as people have lived here. Bears traditionally have foraged at community dumps, backyard dumps, bird-feeders, compost piles, deer troughs full of corn, and (since 1971) hunters baits.
- Bears and humans have competed for human food throughout history. WRI is studying ways to reduce the conflict.

“Female bears that are supplementally-fed breed and produce cubs at a younger age and at shorter intervals; this artificially inflates their reproductive rate and hence the growth of the local population.”

- Bears with access to supplemental food (at residences and hunter baits) do have a higher reproductive rate, but this does not increase the local population.
- Female territoriality limits local bear density. The individual adult females residing in Eagles Nest Township change over time, but the number of territorial adult females (5-6) remains the same.
- Juvenile males generally disperse from their mothers’ territories as yearlings or 2-year-olds, reducing the local population.
- Juvenile females generally take over a portion of their mother’s territory, and the mother makes room by shifting her territory and usurping territory from a neighboring female.

- Where there is a healthy population, the number of bears remains about the same from year to year.

“Supplemental feeding disrupts the normal social system of bears.”

- Nothing in any study we know of supports that claim. Where it has been studied, females establish and defend territories normally, mothers care for cubs normally, families break up normally, bears court and mate normally, males disperse normally, bears make forays outside their usual areas normally, and bears forage on natural foods normally.
- Social hierarchies develop among the bears at feeding stations. The hierarchies reflect the social status of these bears within the overall study area. The same is seen at salmon streams or dense food patches across America. Females still maintain their usual territories.

“Bear feeding often draws bears across busy roadways, increasing their chance of mortality as well as increasing the chance of dangerous car accidents for people.”

- Again, bears routinely cross roads, including Highway 169, and occasionally get killed whether or not they are accessing supplemental food. This was addressed above.

“Bears are adapted to natural food shortages. They have excellent memories and travel long distances to natural food sources. Supplemental feeding disrupts this.”

- Bears prefer natural foods and sometimes travel long distances to get them, whether or not they have access to supplemental food.
- In a nearby study area, 40 percent of the females and 67 percent of the males made excursions outside their usual areas. Eagles Nest bears show a similar pattern. As examples,
 1. In September 1999, a bear with access to unlimited supplemental food traveled 24 miles outside her usual range.
 2. On Sept 17, 2005, a female and cubs with access to supplemental food traveled 15 miles north to feed on acorns in the Boundary Waters.
 3. On August 13, 2007, a 2-year-old female with access to supplemental food left her territory east of Soudan and moved south to a remote area around Putnam and Little Birch Lakes until September 1.

“Bears feeding on natural foods rarely die of starvation, either in summer or winter. Supplemental feeding does not improve their chances of survival.”

- Although starvation is uncommon among adult bears, cubs and yearlings often starve in years of scarce natural food.
- The data clearly show that bears with access to supplemental food do survive at a higher rate than other bears.

“Help us keep our bears wild, healthy, free-ranging, and a source of enjoyment for all!”

- “Wild” This assumes animals that bears accustomed to humans are not ‘wild’. All intelligent animals learn not to waste energy running from creatures that pose no threat, and yet they remain wild.
- “Healthy” The bears of Eagles Nest Township are very healthy. They eat mainly wild foods and use the human foods to supplement their wild food diet.

- “Free-ranging” The bears of Eagles Nest Township are indeed free-ranging. They show the same travel patterns that bears showed in a nearby study area where bears were not fed. Travels are for many purposes beyond simply acquiring calories.
- “Source of enjoyment for all” Bears that are fed are a source of enjoyment and education for many. If the feeding is stopped, homeowners who continue to feed deer and birds will likely have more bear visits which may not be a source of enjoyment for them.

Tom Rusch said at the 9/28 meeting there were more nuisance complaints from Eagles Nest Township in 2007 than from other areas. *Nowhere else in Minnesota has the DNR actively solicited comments about bears and recorded them as “complaints” when the homeowners had no intention of complaining. This ‘over-reporting’ creates an illusion of a bigger problem than really exists, especially considering the fact that the DNR registered no complaints from Eagles Nest Township before 2006.*