

Neighborhood Wildlife Stewards

Teaching our Highlands neighbors how to live safely with wildlife and keeping the wildlife wild.

The Bears Are Back in Town



Juvenile bear investigates BBQ-2981 Davis Loop



Bear buffet found in Maggie's yard

This spring started out slowly in terms of bear activity in the Issaquah Highlands. It was not until mid-June that I began hearing stories of bear sightings. (In the past, April and May were busy months for the bears coming out of hibernation.) First there was an early morning bear visitation in a neighbor's backyard in Ashland Park on Father's Day. Then in Wisteria Park a juvenile bear was investigating the smells from a barbecue from the previous night's cook out. Those photos were posted in the August issue of the Connections paper. Mid afternoon in July a cub was frolicking in the grass on Grand Ridge Drive.

One neighborhood that has continual bear activity this year, similar to past years, is Wisteria Park. Recently, I met Maggie Baker who lives in Wisteria Park and has been a great help in monitoring bear activity in her neighborhood. Maggie and her husband, as well as a few other neighbors, always store their garbage, recycle, and compost bins in their garage until the morning of garbage pick-up. Unfortunately, many other neighbors do not follow Bear Smart Best Practices, and that is why the bears continue to visit the neighborhood. With so much accessible garbage in the neighborhood, a large black bear emerges from the forested greenbelt on a regular basis to follow its nose to the day's tasty offerings. One common access point is through Maggie's yard, but other neighbors are also on the "bear route." The bear wanders the neighborhood, choosing from a buffet of choices-garbage, recycle or compost bins-that are left out on a regular basis. Sometimes the bear feasts on site. Other times, the bear carries the entire garbage bag to a favorite dining location, such as Maggie's backyard or the rockery/greenbelt behind her house.

Maggie, one of many Wisteria Park neighbors, ends up cleaning the rotting garbage strewn about in her yard by the bear, as well as the bear scat. Maggie says that while it is inconvenient to clean up the garbage, her main concern is the safety of her community members and the welfare of the bears. Many of her neighbors share these concerns. Maggie now knows that a bear that eats garbage learns to associate humans with a meal. Soon the bear becomes human food-conditioned which can lead to aggressive behavior. The bear may eventually break into homes and cause property damage or human injury in the pursuit of food. In the end, Fish and Wildlife will be called to intervene, and the bear will be either killed, relocated or hard-released, depending on what the officer decides is best.

Black bears are quite easy to co-exist with once you understand they are driven by their quest for food and can easily smell garbage and bird seed from miles away. It is up to us to prevent bears from being lured into our neighborhoods by food attractants such as garbage, bird feeders, pet food and dirty barbecues. Let's be proactive so we can remain a safe community and prevent any needless killing of bears.

To learn how you can be proactive and keep bears wild visit www.ihwebsite and click on Your Community then Wildlife for information on Bear Smart Best Practices. To see photos of the neighborhood bears, including the juvenile on the barbeque and the cub on Grand Ridge Drive, visit www.nwwildlifestewards.com.

If you care about the welfare of the wildlife in our neighborhood and want to learn more about living safely with the wildlife, contact us about our next meeting at wildlifestewards@gmail.com

Visit our website at www.nwwildlifestewards.com to view wildlife photos taken in Issaquah Highlands and information about co-existing with wildlife.

Written by: Cathy Macchio