



July 16, 2019

Minister Heyman,

Preventing conflict with black bears and other wildlife is a shared responsibility in British Columbia. From individual homeowners to your office, there are multiple facets to managing the human behaviour that leads to inappropriate contact between non-human animals and residents.

However, in any collaborative project, there must be one person who takes the lead, a coordinator with whom the proverbial buck stops. As a wildlife non-profit that interacts with the public to reduce and ultimately end conflict, we are often asked a single question that is nearly impossible to answer with any clarity: who should I call about managing bear attractants and the consequences of attractants?

The Conservation Officer Service, which operates in your ministry, has stated that they are “not responsible for the mismanagement of attractants that cause bear conflicts. Preventing bear conflicts is the responsibility of everyone.”ⁱ

The question becomes, “if not the Conservation Officer Service, then whom?”

WildSafe BC is not in every community, and as far as we can tell, does not have the authority to issue fines or pursue legal action against individuals as the COS can as armed law enforcement officers. Not every municipality has by-laws or the resources to apply to by-law enforcement regarding attractants. Further, the Auditor General’s report of 2017 noted that, “The COS relies on WildSafe BC to deliver an education program to prevent conflict with bears but the program is limited and the COS has not evaluated it for its effectiveness.”ⁱⁱ

The Fur-Bearers, along with many animal lovers in British Columbia, are seeking clarity on who the final person is that makes decisions regarding attractant management. Is there a position in the Ministry of Environment that ultimately oversees the enforcement (or lack thereof) of attractant management sections of the Wildlife Act? Will the Ministry ultimately download this responsibility to municipalities, and publicly state such so that appropriate planning can occur at that level?

British Columbians are tired of watching bears die because some people fail to appropriately manage attractants, and the Conservation Officer Service determines that lethal force is required (without independent oversight, unlike other law enforcement agencies) at their discretion.

We can do better, Minister Heyman. And it starts with getting clarity on the simple question of who is ultimately responsible for enforcement of laws meant to protect wildlife from the irresponsible people in our communities. We look forward to your clarification and response.

Sincerely,

Lesley Fox
Executive Director
The Fur-Bearers

ⁱ Morton, M. (2019, June 01). Public trust in conservation officers eroding in wake of bear killings: Group. Retrieved July 15, 2019, from <https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/public-trust-conservation-service-bears>

ⁱⁱ An Independent Audit of Grizzly Bear Management. (2017, October 24). Retrieved July 15, 2019, from <https://www.bcauditor.com/pubs/2017/independent-audit-grizzly-bear-management> - page 8.