

MEETING SUMMARY

Wolverine Creek Management Committee

May 1, 2006
Kenai River Center
5:30 p.m. to 8:15 p.m.

Meeting purpose: To discuss guide training specifics; generate ideas for ensuring a smooth 2006 season; and to discuss next steps for the WCMC.

Committee members: Doug Brewer, Lance DeSaw, Mark Glassmaker, Alan Helfer, Jeremy Schimmel, and Peter Thompson

Other meeting participants: Bill Davis and Shelly Helfer, and John Czarneski

ADF&G staff: Mark Fink, John Hectel, Doug Hill, Cindi Jacobson, Matt LaCroix, Joe Meehan, Dave Rutz, and Marian Snively

Welcome and opening remarks

Cindi welcomed everyone. The members of the Wolverine Creek Management Committee (WCMC), the public, staff, and other attendees introduced themselves. Joe spoke briefly about the success of the WCMC and said that he would like to see the momentum of this group to be ongoing without the presence of ADF&G. He then encouraged the committee to determine their future goals.

Update: John H. reiterated that ADF&G was not going to be a presence at Wolverine Creek due to the lack of funding. A discussion ensued of potential funding sources to staff wolverine creek in the future. John talked about the Communication Protocol (Attachment 1) that could be used to resolve conflicts at Wolverine creek.

Dave noted that they would continue to use the fish camera for one more year.

The summary from the October 6, 2005 meeting was adopted.

Revised guidelines will be printed and should include the date and be printed on a different colored paper.

Guide training discussion

Kenai guide training will take place June 11 from 5:30 to 9:00 p.m. at the Kenai River Visitor's Center. The Anchorage guide training will take place at the end of May (exact date and location to be determined).

The curriculum for the training will include an overview of the guidelines, history of the area, bear behavior, and proper etiquette in the cove. If members want to include other topics, such as specific scenarios, they need to send it by email to John prior to May 15. It was suggested that at the end of the training, the guides have an opportunity to discuss their experiences. Mark G. suggested using the curriculum from the Guide Academy as a guide for the bear training class. Doug suggested that boat storage responsibility should be brought up during the training. Mechanisms for dealing with confrontations in the field as well as etiquette on the hog line would also be good topics for discussion at the bear guide training.

This summer

Doug presented his report (Attachment 2) that suggested ways for making the summer season go smoothly without the presence of ADF&G. Some members were concerned about potential problems as a result of ADF&G's absence, particularly the loss of accounting of the presence or absence of specific bears. Other members were less concerned that things would fall apart because ADF&G was gone. All members agree that John's guide training program will likely aid in keeping things together. The communication protocol will be given to the guides during the training. John asked members of the WCMC to provide comments to improve the protocol by May 15 (see Attachment 1).

The group discussed boat storage problems, and Matt mentioned that although there is a mechanism for citing boats, budget and workload make it difficult for staff to be present on site.

Future of the WCMC

The members were asked if they wanted to continue with the WCMC. The general consensus was positive, and some participants thought that the charter should be expanded to include the west side of Cook Inlet and boat storage issues.

Cindi stressed that the WCMC needed to assume more responsibility for their direction and activities. She suggested that the WCMC elect leaders for the group, as her participation as group organizer will diminish over the next year. She will have to move on to other projects after the spring 2007 meeting. Other ADF&G staff will continue to be involved. The group decided to try a rotating chair system (new chair each meeting). Jeremy was volunteered as the chair for the first rotation. Cindi will assist Jeremy in organization of the next meeting. She will develop a questionnaire to get feedback from the members of the committee such as its future direction.

Miscellaneous

Members spoke of having guides keep track of bear counts on their own and the numbers be tallied at the end of the season. Although the counts will not be as comprehensive as Doug's, they will provide good information.

Next meeting:

The next meeting was scheduled for October 4 in Anchorage (location to be determined). However, the members who attended the meeting expressed concern about having the next meeting in Anchorage because few Anchorage-based members attended meetings in Anchorage or on the Kenai Peninsula. Cindi said that attendance and meeting location will be discussed at the next meeting.

Adjourn:

The meeting adjourned at 8:15

Attachment 1

draft

Communication Protocol
for
Wolverine Creek Area

May 1, 2006

1. Address issues on site: Communicate amongst yourselves; make an effort to talk to new users or those who may not be familiar with the guidelines.

If that doesn't work....

2. Make a follow-up phone call to the guide to resolve the issue.

If that doesn't work....

3. Call the appropriate owner/operator.

If that doesn't work....

4. Send an e-mail message to the WCMC (including John, Joe, and Cindi) stating your concern.

If that doesn't work....

5. Call John Hechtel

907-267-2199

John_Hechtel@fishgame.state.ak.us

If John is not available....

6. Call Joe Meehan

907-267-2281

Joe_Meehan@fishgame.state.ak.us

- We encourage you to communicate with the WCMC via e-mail during the season. Periodic updates would be very helpful.

- If your clients or other members of the public want to submit comments about the Wolverine Creek area, please give them the following e-mail address:

wolverinecreek@fishgame.state.ak.us

Report by Doug Hill.

WCMC – May 1, 2005 – Kenai River Center - Doug Hill

There were over approximately 11345 visitors (~2130 guides & ~270 private) at Big River Lake in 2005. That's approximately 2613 more visitors than 2003, when there were approximately 8732 visitors (~1052 guides & ~700 private). I think we all know that Wolverine Creek is more than just another fishing hole. Many angling visitors do not visit just to fish for salmon. I am relatively certain that the number of visitors identified as anglers would be noticeably lower if the bears were not present. The opportunity to not only fish for salmon, but to also view brown and black bears at close range, with a minimal time commitment and minimal physical effort (allowing for a wide range of ages, physical ability and health status) in the relative safety of a skiff, at a picturesque fly-in bush Alaska site is obviously an attractive activity for many people.

Considering what I just said, it is hard for me to understand why anyone would have a difficult time complying with the simple and minimal directives of the "Guidelines for Fishing at Wolverine Creek" and the boat storage permit stipulations. Implementation and compliance is in the best interest of all Big River Lake visitors. These directives are simply tools that assist in perpetuating both human and bear activity and a certain level of environmental quality at Wolverine Creek and Big River Lake.

The WCMC was convened in part to avoid creating regulations. ADF&G staff is cognizant of the fact that, if necessary, the creation of a set of Wolverine Creek/Big River Lake specific regulations is not out of the question.

Self-Policing

In 2006 non-ADF&G WCMC representatives and their associates will be the visible face and primary voice of the guidelines and the WCMC process. The guidelines represent a considerable amount of your time and effort and it will be your task to ensure that on-site Big River Lake visitors are aware of the guidelines. If a WCMC participant thinks that he or she cannot take responsibility for promoting the guidelines it might worth contemplating what they think they would like the Wolverine Creek and Big River Lake experience to be like in 5 or 10 years.

Non-ADF&G monitoring and implementation of the "Management Guidelines for the Wolverine Creek Area" will further demonstrate support for:

- 1) The WCMC process;
- 2) Maintaining and improving the experience at Wolverine Creek Cove; and
- 3) Maintaining the co-existence of bears and humans at Wolverine Creek Cove.

In a nutshell, in order for the season to run smoothly and to the general satisfaction of the WCMC and ADF&G, all that on-site visitors need to do is comply with the guidelines, the boat storage permit stipulations, and sport-fishing regulations. This will obviously

require that on-site visitors in particular review and understand the guidelines and the boat storage stipulations.

In general, the most recent code of behavior at Wolverine Creek and around Big River Lake affirms the value of the guidelines in the cove and around the Big River Lake area. If this system is to remain intact, you are the people that are going to have to work to ensure its maintenance. This message has to get to individuals that are frequent Big River Lake visitors. I can't tell you how to do this, but I can strongly recommend that frequent Big River Lake visitors work together and arrive at some sort of protocol for non-aggressive implementation of WCMC guidelines. This includes dealing with non-compliant visitors in a calm and respectful manner. Needless to say, if an on-site interaction becomes aggressive it is time to back off.

When possible ADF&G has attempted to be flexible and accommodating in its implementation of the guidelines. For example, if someone arrived at the site without a container for fish ADF&G provided one and informed them that they would have to catch and release if they showed up without a container in the future. Most visitors that were new to Wolverine Creek system were willing to comply with guidelines. Some bucked the system for a while but eventually understood the reasoning behind the guidelines. Some individuals were never seen again.

ADF&G understood that not all non-compliance issues were black and white. For example, guides sometimes had belligerent and disrespectful clients, and bears sometimes approached faster than lines could be pulled out of the water. Rather than pouncing on someone for not being compliant, ADF&G typically evaluated the situation and incorporated this into discussions with non-compliant individuals. When someone was not compliant with a guideline, 99.9% of the time they were not approached in an antagonistic manner.

If an impasse regarding the guidelines arises at Wolverine Creek/Big River Lake do not hesitate to call ADF&G. See protocol handout.

Suggestions & Complaints

If someone wants to file an official complaint, they need to be certain that the complaint is legitimate and reflects an understanding of the guidelines and the boat storage permit stipulations. We want to avoid expending time and money on issues that turn out to be personal opinions or simply personal distaste for another individual. Suggestions are encouraged and welcomed.

North Shore

Although not in the guidelines, anchoring skiffs at the east end (lakeside) of the north shore rocks rather than along the base of the rocks has been a voluntary action by a number of sport fishing guides. Anchoring skiffs at the east end of the north shore rocks does a lot to foster positive visitor interactions. It allows bears unimpeded access to the north shore rocks and provides anglers and bear viewers in the center hog line better bear viewing and photo opportunities. It also creates a less confining angling experience.

Reminder

Wolverine Creek Cove is a public waterway and there is no decree that states that guided angling vessels have more rights than bear-viewers or private groups in Wolverine Creek Cove. Our observations indicate that bear viewers and private visitors are more often than not willing to work with guided anglers. If a bear-viewing vessel is in one of the hog lines ask them if it is all right to pull in front of them. In other words, angling vessels should treat bear-viewers and private visitor the same as you would treat another guided fishing vessel.

Miscellaneous - Need to work on (from 2005):

Fish left in landing nets for extended periods of time;

Unnecessary hazing of bears;

Ceasing to fish within 30' of bears;

Casting toward & too close to bears;

Gear & garbage at certain boat storage areas;

Idle into cove (no wake zone?);

Dumping fish carcasses at the base of Fisher Falls – chumming bears;

Boats that are not permitted.

We plan to do a few site inspections this summer.

Troopers?

ADF&G will provide guideline brochures for distribution.

We want feedback! We appreciate your time, interest, and efforts.

Thanks,

Doug Hill

ADF&G – DWC