

Island Park News

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New Bear Safety Materials Now Available

By Julie Hamilton

Just in time for summer sun and outdoor adventure, the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) has released its latest bear avoidance and wildlife stewardship materials emphasizing bear safety techniques, which can also be applied to most forms of wildlife. The Center for Wildlife Information (CWI), a non-profit organization headed by Chuck Bartlebaugh, Director, coordinated the development of educational materials for the IGBC and their partners, which include all four of the state wildlife management agencies in the Northwest (Washington, Idaho, Montana., Wyoming), the Forest Service, Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the USGS Research.



Chris Servheen, Grizzly Bear Recovery Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has worked with CWI for more than ten years in educating the public about grizzly bears and bear safety. "The products created by CWI are the primary bear safety educational materials we use in grizzly bear recovery," Servheen said. "They are exceptionally well received by the public because they are readable, graphically attractive, and very professional, and CWI always checks information with us first to ensure its accuracy," he said. "[Bartlebaugh] is a package of energy producing these bear education materials, and we are glad to be working with him."



Wildlife safety instructors across the country have been impressed by the collectible quality and striking design of materials such as the "Be Bear Aware" and "Hiking in Bear Country" 12-panel foldable brochures. The brochures contain valuable information like what to do in case of bear encounters or charges, how to properly use bear spray and store food, how to identify grizzly bears and black bears, and why people should never approach or feed wildlife. The messages in the text are reinforced by vivid photos, many taken by Bartlebaugh himself, of bears in thick brush, mother bears and their cubs, bears examining unattended backpacks, and bear signs such as trees with claw marks and diggings.



CWI, through its Be Bear Aware and Wildlife Stewardship campaign and in conjunction with the IGBC, has produced more than 500,000 brochures. It has also produced over 700,000 bear avoidance coloring books in the U.S. and Canada, more than 500,000 black bear and grizzly bear identification cards—the perfect size for a shirt pocket or car sun-visor—and has developed five different bear avoidance display themes currently in use in 30 areas across the Northwest. The goal of the educational materials is to emphasize and disseminate a clear, concise, and consistent message from all wildlife and land management agencies regarding bear and wildlife safety and stewardship.

One of CWI's best received educational tools is The Bear Avoidance Training Trailer, decorated on the outside with grizzly bear and black bear photographs and filled with educational materials, including grizzly and black bear mounts. It is a classroom on wheels.

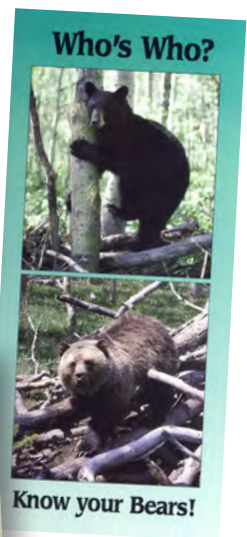
The eye-catching trailer can't even stop to fill up the gas tank without attracting crowds. "We've given impromptu presentations at gas stations, in store parking lots, even at rest stops," Bartlebaugh said. The bear mounts are especially popular, and younger kids love to compare the black bear and the grizzly bear mounts by comparing their claws and facial features. The trailer, supported by hunting and fishing organizations, has been such a success that five more are currently under production.



CWI also pairs with organizations such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America, CampFire, and students in grades 1-12 to teach people of all ages how to be bear aware. That is where CWI's unique train-the-trainer program, which empowers willing volunteers with the knowledge and resources necessary to teach bear avoidance and wildlife stewardship techniques, becomes valuable. Through this program, older generations teach the younger generations who look up to them as role models. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts can teach Cub Scouts and Brownies, and high school students can teach middle and elementary school students.

CWI has a history of engaging young people. In 1994, working with communication studies students from universities around the country, CWI became the first non-government agency to research and study visitors in Yellowstone National Park and the surrounding forest. Students conducting the survey observed that many visitors overlooked the signage and information handed to them at the park gates and were shocked to discover that 70 percent of the people they interviewed still thought it was ok to approach and feed wildlife, even bears. The park service believed the information gathered was so important that it was featured in the quarterly publication Yellowstone Science, vol. 2, no. 2.

CWI again researched public conceptions of wildlife safety after the 2005 release of the movie Grizzly Man, which detailed the deaths of Timothy Treadwell and Amie Huguenard in Alaska bear country. Over 90 percent of people polled in the Northwest thought Treadwell was acting irresponsibly and would not imitate his actions, but many people further east in cities such as Atlanta, Geor. and Toledo, Ohio saw Treadwell as a possible "Jane Goodall of bears," Bartlebaugh said. When the audience in these areas were asked if they would imitate Treadwell, the consensus was "no"; they would stay "at least 25 feet away." In Yellowstone Park, though, people are required to maintain a distance of 100 yards—considerably more than 25 feet.

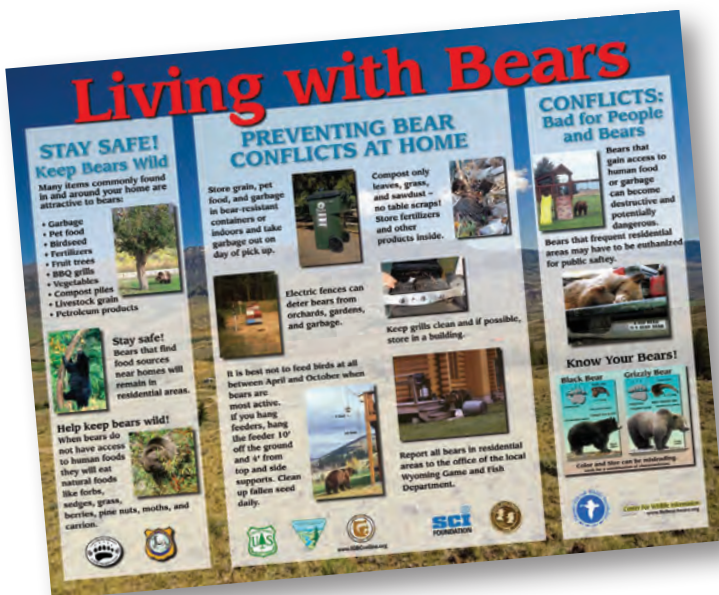


Bartlebaugh believes the primary reason for such misperceptions in 2005 was the misinformation people were receiving on TV, and he sees many of those old irresponsible messages returning today, in 2010. “The public is being inundated with messages that say it is ok to approach, follow, interact with, and feed wildlife,” Bartlebaugh said. “Kissing bears has become a kind of YouTube phenomena, after it was featured on television shows and in National Geographic,” he said.



Kerry Gunther, Bear Management Biologist for Yellowstone National Park, keeps CWI’s “Hiking in Bear Country” brochures available in the Bear Management Office to help ensure visitors receive important, accurate bear safety information. “The educational brochures help to counteract misconceptions about bear behavior and safety techniques which can be fueled by reality shows and high-profile stories,” Gunther said. “CWI’s information comes from agencies and bear experts, so it’s up-to-date and accurate, and it is presented in a professional format that is well-received by the public,” he said. “We don’t find the ‘Hiking in Bear Country’ brochures in garbage cans or blowing around the park, so we can assume visitors keep the bear safety information throughout their time at Yellowstone.”

CWI has found the public to be very responsive to a positive message about enjoying wildlife safely and responsibly. When people learn they can play an important part in keeping wildlife, especially bears, from being habituated and food-conditioned, they tend to respond in a positive manner. “People understand the need to help keep wildlife wild for future generations to enjoy,” Bartlebaugh said.



Layout by Jackson Goodell

To learn more about the bear safety and educational materials and programs CWI has available, go to

www.BeBearAware.org

click on “Products and Programs.”