

LIVING IN BEAR AND COUGAR COUNTRY

June 2008

Black bears are a fact of life in Edelweiss and the rest of the Methow Valley. Cougars are also present in the general area since large tracts of undisturbed land surround Edelweiss. These animals co-exist peacefully with us if we are all proactive about not attracting them and are smart about preventing conflicts.

Most residents and visitors like to see bears and feel lucky if they do. Sighting a cougar might sound exciting but most of us would choose to avoid a close encounter. Unfortunately bears can and do occasionally find non-natural attractants left out by us humans, which can lead to problems for both bears and humans. This June, we've had a few small groups of black bears scavenge for food throughout Edelweiss. They've raided garbage cans, pet and bird food, bird feeders and compost to name a few things. Some of these bears have been mothers with cubs. Unfortunately, these bears are becoming "human-habituated bears" and "food-conditioned bears." Even worse, the mothers are teaching their young that they can find easy food around humans and houses. Once conditioned, most bears will continue to seek out human food sources, if not in Edelweiss in other areas. This is unhealthy for the bears and potentially dangerous for humans. These types of bears often become aggressive around humans because they are no longer afraid. The key to their welfare is for all of us to learn and use "bear sense" (primarily remove possible food sources) and to move the offending bears away from human food sources, because as the saying goes, "a fed bear is a dead bear."

For the bears' welfare and the safety of Edelweiss residents, Edelweiss worked with the area's Wildlife Officer from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to try to humanely trap the offending bears in large cages. No bears were caught and they appear to have moved on to other areas for the time being. The Wildlife Officer may still have to trap them in other areas if these bears are still seeking out human food sources. If caught, the bear(s) will be given an ear-tag and transported to a backcountry location from which it is unlikely they will return. Mothers and cubs are kept together.

There are very occasional sightings of cougars in or near Edelweiss, which tend to travel and hunt at dawn and dusk. Few people will ever catch a glimpse of a cougar much less confront one. It's been said that, "cougars make their living by not being seen." Educating yourself about cougar behavior and habits, and preventing conflicts is the key to human and pet safety. A wealth of information can be found at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living/cougars.htm>.

We encourage everyone to learn more about co-existing with Black Bears. Please visit <http://www.bearinfo.org/tips.htm>. On this website, you'll also see other links that might be of interest, such as "Biology and Behavior," and "Bear Smart," as well as links for bear-proof garbage containers.

To report a nuisance bear, a cougar sighting, or to ask questions, please contact our General Manager, Dick Volckmann, at cvrv@centurytel.net or 996-9897 or the Edelweiss office at edelweiss@methownet.com or 996-9232. Be sure and let them know if you would like to receive email reports of other sightings so we can add you to our email distribution list.