



Press Release

NEW PORT COQUITLAM BEAR AWARE COORDINATOR BRINGS IMPRESSIVE TRACK RECORD

Port Coquitlam, BC – APRIL 28, 2009 ... Not many people know as much about bears as Louise Williams – or find them as fascinating as she does. But the City of Port Coquitlam's new Bear Aware Coordinator is working to change that.

On April 20, Williams officially launched the City's Bear Aware program, funded by City Council last month in an attempt to address the community's escalating bear issues. Williams will work with City staff and provide guidance regarding effective control of bear attractants (such as garbage), as well as bylaws, enforcement and public education.

One of her key roles is to be the face of the Bear Aware program in Port Coquitlam. In her first week on the job, Williams had already set up 10 school presentations, distributed Bear Aware brochures around town and started asking local businesses to post Bear Aware posters.

"The goal of the program is to reduce bear-human conflict through education, innovation and cooperation," Williams said. "I'm here to help people learn more about why we are seeing more bears at our homes and in the city, and how we can make a few simple changes to be able to peacefully co-exist with them."

Williams is intrigued by bears and has spent the last decade working with them – including rehabilitating grizzly bears, doing bear response and working as the Bear Aware Coordinator for three years in Golden, BC.

"I met pretty close to 200 different black bears in Golden," she said. "The Bear Aware program there was very successful – it went from more than a dozen bears killed each year down to zero."

Last year, about 800 bear complaints were reported in Port Coquitlam – up from 224 in 2006. Nine bears were killed last year in Port Coquitlam alone after they became habituated to garbage and other human food sources.

Along with her keen interest in bears, Williams' biology degree and background as a teacher makes her uniquely suited to coordinate the City's Bear Aware program, which runs until early November.

Schools, clubs and groups of all types can invite her to give a free presentation, which she promises will be interesting and age-appropriate. Residents can also call the toll-free Bear Aware hotline at 778-822-BEAR to get help resolving bear issues and to report bear sightings, to help the City identify and resolve problems with attractants.

Other plans include a Bear Aware open house, guest speakers, participation in community events, a fun "Adopt a Business Bear" program and distribution of information in neighbourhoods with bear activity. The City will use the City's website, media releases, E-update newsletters, Twitter and the City's Facebook page to advertise the Bear Aware activities.

“This program is important for the safety of people in the community, and the safety of the bears. As we move into territory bears used to have for themselves, we have to decide whether we are going to kill them or live successfully with them,” Williams said. “This program can have a huge impact on people – people think they know about bears, but there’s so much for us to learn yet about how they tick and how our behaviours influence their behaviours.”

Williams noted that it is human activity that creates so-called “problem bears,” and the fact that bears can find food year-round has in some cases permanently changed their natural hibernation behaviour. “The exciting thing is this is a problem that can be solved. It just takes time, and the cooperation of residents, businesses, the Conservation Officer Service, RCMP and the City.”

Here are some ways to make your home less attractive to bears:

- Secure all garbage cans or carts and keep them indoors if possible.
- Don’t put garbage out to the curb until the morning of pickup day.
- Collect ripe fruit immediately from trees and the ground.
- Don’t leave pet food outside.
- Never approach, interact or feed bears.
- Sprinkle lime inside backyard composters to deter bears.

More information can be found at www.portcoquitlam.ca/bears, or by calling the toll-free Bear Aware hotline at 778-822-BEAR. Those interested in volunteering with Bear Aware can also call 778-822-BEAR.

Bears showing aggressive behaviour should be reported to the Conservation Officer Service 24-hour hotline 1-877-952-RAPP or www.rapp.bc.ca. If a bear poses an immediate public safety threat, call 911.

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