

Ministry of Natural
Resources

Ministère des Richesses
naturelles

Office of the Deputy Minister

Bureau du sous-ministre

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May 3, 2012

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Dear Chief Administrative Officer/Clerk:

I am writing to let you know about some changes the Ministry of Natural Resources is making to the Bear Wise program.

As part of our Transformation Plan announced in the 2012 Ontario Budget, the ministry conducted a review of how we deliver programs and services to Ontarians. The Bear Wise program was part of that review.

Bear Wise has set a solid foundation, helping municipalities and the public to reduce preventable human-bear encounters. In fact, no other jurisdiction in North America has provided this level of support to communities.

Today, eight years into the program, awareness of Bear Wise is high and many municipalities have good, robust bear wise strategies in place. As a result of the program, the public is better educated about what to do when they encounter a bear. In this regard, Bear Wise has achieved its main goals, and the time is right to transition from an active management model to one that places a greater emphasis on personal responsibility.

Most aspects of the Bear Wise program will continue, including:

- operating the toll-free Bear Reporting Line (1-866-514 -2327) 24 hours a day, seven days a week from April to November, with trained staff handling calls and determining the appropriate response
- educating the public about black bears and bear behaviour in Ontario
- providing advice to municipalities, the public, and other stakeholders about what they can do to keep bears away from urban and semi-urban areas, and how to manage problem bears
- tracking and collecting information about human-bear occurrences
- maintaining our comprehensive website to assist Ontarians with tips to ensure that their properties are not inviting to bears.

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The ministry will continue to support the Ontario Provincial Police and local police services in responding to emergency situations. However, moving forward, we will no longer provide individual site visits to help landowners who are having site-specific conflicts with bears, and the ministry will no longer trap and relocate problem bears. Trapping and relocating has always been our least effective tool to manage problem bears, with research showing that many relocated bears simply return to the area from where they were removed.

Responsibility for managing human-bear conflicts continues to be shared between the province and local governments. The investments municipalities make in bear wise strategies, whether it's a public awareness campaign or bear-resistant waste management infrastructure, will result in long-term savings and cleaner, safer and healthier communities. Going forward, the ministry will continue to provide advice and support to municipalities on how to manage bears, as we do for other wildlife species.

Senior ministry staff have already been in contact with the Ontario Provincial Police regarding the Bear Wise program changes. Where formal or informal agreements exist with local municipal or First Nations police forces, ministry staff from the districts will be following up with their contacts in the police services.

If you have any questions about these changes to the Bear Wise program, please contact the district manager for your area. Contact information for district offices is available on our website at www.ontario.ca/mnr. Click *Contact Us* from the top toolbar, and then *Where to find MNR services* from the toolbar on the left.

Sincerely,



David O'Toole
Deputy Minister