

KBSIC Southern Foothills Bear Resistant Container Loan Program 2008 Final Report

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The Foothills Bear Resistant Container Loan Program is designed to provide residents of rural communities with the knowledge and tools needed to help them reduce bear-human conflicts at their homes and acreages. These bear conflicts are commonly related to unsecured bear attractants such as residential garbage, birdseed, pet food and livestock feed. The specific objectives of the Program are to:

1. distribute bear-resistant containers to area residents experiencing bear problems resulting from on-site artificial attractants;
2. implement a public awareness campaign that will promote the container loan program and educate residents regarding the effective management of bear attractants; and
3. monitor the outcome of container use in terms of eliminating bear attractants and reducing problem bear activity.

Bragg Creek BearSmart and the Karelian Bear Shepherding Institute of Canada (KBSIC) first initiated the container loan program in 2006. With funding from the Alberta Conservation Association, 12 bear-resistant containers were purchased for use in the Bragg Creek area. In 2008, 9 additional bear-resistant bins were purchased. The program gained additional financial support from the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative. The Y2Y funds were used to hire a Program Coordinator who was responsible for creating awareness of the container loan program and disseminating bins to landowners. The 2008 program was expanded into new locations of the Rocky Mountain Foothills, where there is a history of bear-human conflicts related to unnatural bear attractants.

2008 Program Results and Discussion

Building Public Awareness

In the spring of 2008, we initiated a public awareness campaign to promote the container loan program. Our strategy was similar to that used in previous years with some changes made to accommodate the broader program area and to try out several new campaign ideas. The following outreach initiatives were implemented to promote the 2008 program and to promote bear deterrence in general.

1. **Bear Bin Decals:** In 2008, we wanted to make it obvious that the purpose of our containers was to deter bears. To do so, we designed a decal that identifies the bins as bear-resistant (see Figure 1.0). We created 21 decals for use on loaner bins. As more and more of the decal bins are distributed throughout area communities, we anticipate that residents will be introduced to the idea of bear-proofing their homes and acreages and ultimately choose to take part in the program.
2. **Poster Distribution:** in late May/early June, 17 program posters, as well as Alberta BearSmart Brochures, were distributed to the following rural communities within our expanded program area: Water Valley, Cochrane, Bragg Creek, Redwood Meadows, Millarville, Priddis, Black Diamond, Turner Valley and Longview (Attachments: see distribution map and poster). Venues for the distribution of posters and brochures included coffee shops, restaurants, libraries, grocery stores, leisure centers, banks and horse/livestock supply stores.



Figure 1.0: Bear-resistant container with decal

3. **MD of Rocky View Mail-out:** Since the container loan program was first initiated, we have fostered a positive working relationship with the Municipal District (MD) of Rocky View. In May, the MD offered to include loaner program information on the back of over 1,100 MD brochures for distribution in and around Bragg Creek. This season, we also approached the MD of Foothills and requested their assistance in distributing similar brochures. Our initial correspondence with the MD was positive although, in the end, we were not able to carry through with this initiative. In the future, we hope to build our relationship with the MD of Foothills and work together on such education and outreach endeavors.
4. **Newspaper Articles:** Throughout the season, articles were written and presented in the High Country News: a local newspaper with a circulation of 9,200 rural residents in Bragg Creek, Redwood Meadows, Priddis, Springbank, Millarville, Black Diamond, Turner Valley and Longview. Subjects for the articles included the container loan program, bear attractants, bear-proofing your garden, and the effectiveness of bear spray in deterring bears. Each article included a reminder for residents to participate in the container loaner program. In August, the promotional poster was also presented as a one-page add.
5. **Displays:** In July, a BearSmart and Bear Resistant Container Program display was presented at Bragg Creek Days. In August, the same display was presented at the Cochrane Farmer's Market.

Distribution of Bear Resistant Containers

In 2008, we were successful in expanding the container loan program into a broader area of the Southern Rocky Mountain Foothills. This season, we loaned containers primarily to resident in Bragg Creek (10) but also residents in Priddis (3), Millarville (2), Redwood Meadows (1), Cochrane (1), and Water Valley (1). A total of 23 bear-resistant bins were loaned to these residents, some of whom borrowed more than one bin at a time. Unbearable Bins Inc. supplied us with several additional bins to accommodate resident's needs. Four residents borrowed bins in response to bear problems they were experiencing, namely black bears accessing poorly stored garbage. One resident had a black bear enter her barn to access poorly stored livestock feed. The remaining 13 residents borrowed the bear-resistant bins in order to be proactive and avoid attracting bears.

Of the 23 bins loaned, 18 were subsequently purchased by residents interested in deterring bears over the long-term (Figure 2.0). The majority of bin loaners in 2006 and 2007 also ended up purchasing their bins. Overall, 2008 marked a substantial increase in bin use when compared to previous years of the program. Increased bin use is likely attributed to our 3 year public awareness campaign and growing community awareness of the program. Concern over recent bear activity may have also been a factor although bear occurrences in 2008 were relatively low when compared to previous years.

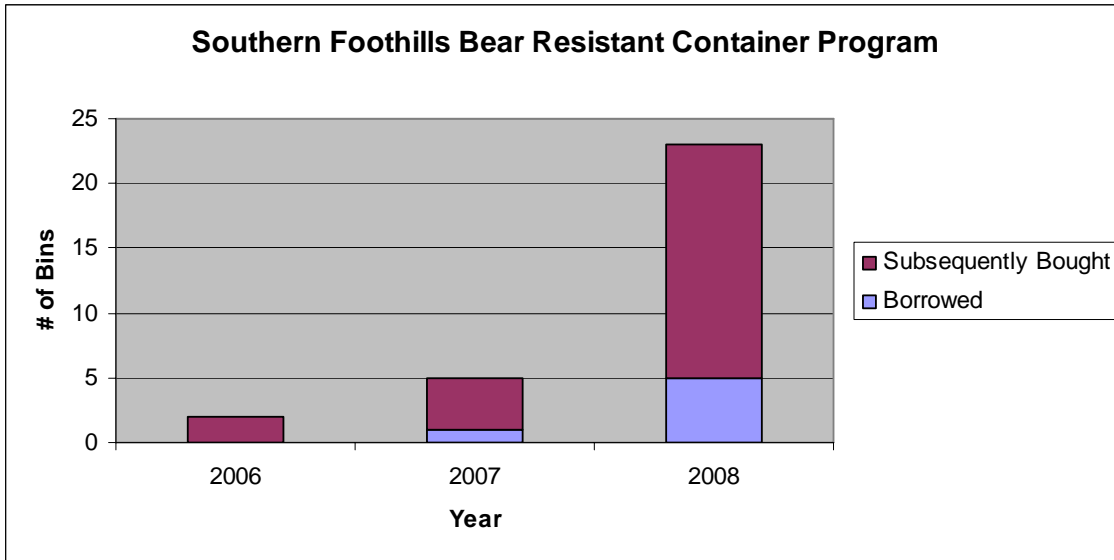


Figure 2.0: Bins loaned and subsequently purchased by residents

Program Success

A key objective of the Bear Resistant Container Program was to monitor the outcome of container use in terms of eliminating bear attractants and reducing problem bear activity. Specifically, we measured the success of the 2008 program based on the following outcomes.

Effective Use of the Bins

We anticipated a successful year if the bear resistant bins were applied in most bear-conflict situations deemed appropriate by local Fish and Wildlife officers. To this end, we endeavored to work closely with area officers to evaluate conflict situations and apply the bins where needed. In the first two years of the program, we developed a strong working relationship with officers in the Cochrane district, north of and including Bragg Creek. These officers have been very open to working with us, keeping us informed with respect to bear occurrences in the district. This year, the Cochrane district reported relatively low bear occurrences when compared to other years. Officers referred all of the residents involved in suitable conflict situations, i.e. incident where unsecured attractants were a concern, to the program. One Bragg Creek resident with prior black bear problems borrowed one, then two bins to manage residential waste. She has since purchased both containers. There were an additional 5 reported bear occurrences in Redwood Meadows involving residential garbage. Unfortunately, no residents involved in these incidents contacted us to borrow a bin. There were also several incidents involving a black bear accessing refuse at the fruit stand in Bragg Creek. This fruit stand has a history of problems with bears accessing produce disposed of behind the stand. Again, the individual involved in these incidents did not contact us to borrow a bin. Overall, we conclude that continued education and exposure to the program is required to encourage residents experiencing bear problems to take part in the loaner program.

Our 2008 program area also included communities located within the High River Fish and Wildlife district, south of Bragg Creek. Our relationship with this district is positive and growing but will likely need more time to evolve as the program continues. This year the district reported that residents of the area had been referred to the program when bear problems were deemed appropriate for bin use. In the future, we hope to work more closely with officers of this district in implementing the program to reduce or eliminate bear conflicts in the region.

As indicated previously, 13 residents borrowed bear-resistant containers, not because they were experiencing problems with bears, but because they wanted to be proactive in deterring bears. One of these residents learned of the loaner program through contacting Fish and Wildlife directly. However, the majority of these individuals discovered the program through articles and adds in the High Country News. Two other individuals learned of the program from the MD of Rocky View mail out, while one resident pursued the program after having been canvassed by Bragg Creek BearSmart in 2007. We conclude that regular articles and adds in the local newspaper appear to have had the most significant effect in encouraging areas residents to take part in the program.

Overall, we feel that our bear-resistant containers were used in some but not all applicable bear conflict situations. In the future, we hope to work more closely with Fish and Wildlife in applying the bins to resolve bear conflict situations.

Effectiveness of Bear Resistant Containers

In 2008, we monitored the outcome of resident use of the bins. To evaluate whether our bins deterred bears, we recorded:

- a. the number of return trips by bears once bins were in place;
- b. if bears were successful or unsuccessful in obtaining food rewards (i.e. breaking into the bins);
and
- c. whether or not landowners continued to secure attractants after bins were removed from their residences.

In 2008, there were three situations where bears visited and/or tried to access bear resistant containers. At one household in Bragg Creek, a bin purchased to proactively manage bear problems was visited twice by a black bear. Both times, the bin was rolled several meters from the household but the bear was unable to break into the bin. In a second situation, a black bear visited a Bragg Creek household that had borrowed a bin in response to problems experienced earlier in the season. The black bear ignored the bear-resistant bin full of garbage but accessed other poorly stored waste at the site. A third incident again involved a Bragg Creek household with prior black bear problems. Once the bear-resistant container was in place, the bear revisited the site and dragged the bin around but was unable to break into the bin. In a second visit, the bear applied less effort, dragging the bin only a short distance from the home before abandoning it altogether.

These results suggest that bears attempting to access waste stored in our bear-resistant containers were deterred in all three recorded incidents. As a result of their experiences, the three residents involved in these conflict situations have since purchased containers for their long-term use in deterring bears.

Long-term use of Bear-resistant Bins

We also gauged the success of the 2008 program based on the number of residents who purchased bins for their personal use. We considered this year a success as the majority of bin users (78%) ended up purchasing their bins.

Conclusions

Overall, we are greatly encouraged by the results of the Bear Resistant Container Program in 2008. We were effective in expanding the program to new communities in need of practical tools to
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reduce their bear conflict risk. We also encouraged a significant number of residents to take an active role in deterring bears from their communities. Our challenge in the future will be to continue developing our working relationship with Fish and Wildlife so that we can ensure that the bins are used in all appropriate bear conflicts situations.

The container program represents an innovative approach that pro-actively engages community members in bear conflict management. Working with and empowering residents of rural communities to take the initiative in managing attractants is a fundamental element of program. We anticipate that, in the years to come, the container program will continue to be a catalyst for encouraging residents to become good bear stewards, making rural communities safer for both people and bears.

Attachments:

1. Promotional Poster
2. Poster Distribution Map

Bear Resistant CONTAINER PROGRAM

Without realizing it, you may have attracted a bear to your home or acreage.



**The Karelian Bear
Shepherding Institute of
Canada** (KBSIC), in partnership
with Alberta Sustainable
Resource Development, have
created a **Bear-Resistant
Container Program** to help
you secure garbage, livestock
feed and pet food away
from bears.

How The Program Works

- 1 Call the Fish and Wildlife, Cochrane District at 1 (403) 932-2388 or 1-800-642-3800 with your bear conflict concerns.
- 2 If appropriate, a container will be delivered to your home by your local KBSIC program coordinator: Karen Oldershaw.
- 3 The container will be loaned to you to resolve your immediate bear problems. After the initial loan period, you may contact Karen at 949-3797 for information and advice on avoiding conflicts with bears in the long-term.



PROGRAM PARTNERS



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Help make your community a safer place
for both people and bears

Southern Foothills Bear Resistant Container Loan Program

Promotional Poster and BearSmart Brochure Distribution

