

BLACK BEAR MANAGEMENT

2013 Annual Report



Photo: Redwood National Park

April 2, 2014

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes black bear management activities that occurred within Redwood National and State Parks (RNSP or “parks”) during 2013. The report also summarizes all important bear observations and incidents, bear- related education efforts, funding, known mortalities, and 2014 priorities for black bear management within RNSP.

BEAR OBSERVATIONS AND INCIDENTS

Wildlife Observation Data

There were 72 observations of 90 black bears reported on RNSP wildlife observation cards or bear observation logs during 2013 (see Appendix A), a decrease in numbers from 2012, and similar to 2011 when there were 73 observations of 88 black bears reported. These numbers are also similar to the mean ($\pm$ sd) numbers reported in the period from 2004-2009 (72.5 ± 12.7 observations of 90.3 ± 12.3 bears), but far lower than the record high average of 195 reported from 1996 to 2000. All but two observations were from within the parks; the two not within the parks were in close proximity to the national park boundary in both cases (see the map at the end of the document).

The majority of observations were of single bears with 2 bears reported together 9 times, 3 bears reported together 3 times and 1 report of 4 bears in a group. Most of the reports were in May, June and July (70%) followed by August and April. There were no bear observations in February, March, or November (Fig. 1).

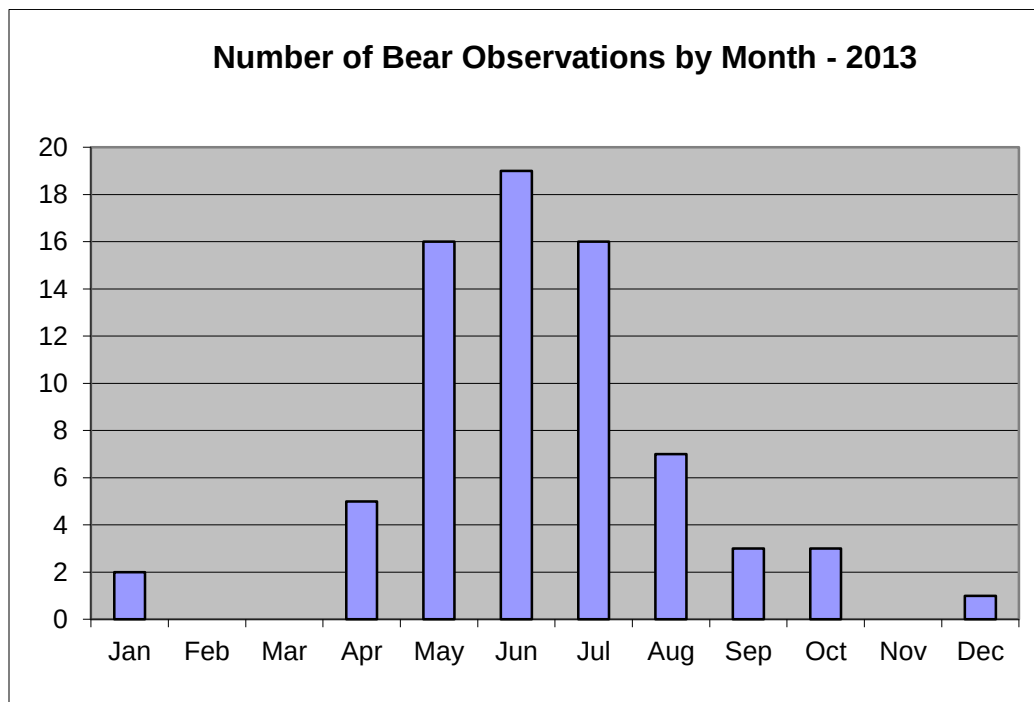


Figure 1. Number of bear observations reported on RNSP wildlife observation cards and by park employees, and month that the observations occurred, during 2013 (total =72).

Very similar to last year, the majority of observations (78%) were south of the Klamath River.

Although the majority of the reports (37%) were of bears crossing a road, or near a road, unlike previous years these locations did not constitute well over half of the observations. Twenty-one percent of the observations were in “back-country” areas including trails, a Redwood Creek gravel bar, or in prairies away from roads. Overall, 19% of bear observations were in prairies (some seen from vehicles), and 15% of the observations included developed areas such as parking lots, housing areas, and an old mill site. Eight percent of the observations were from bears near a marsh, lagoon, or beach. It is important to note, that the total number of bears recorded does not necessarily indicate a number of unique individuals. For example, it is likely that a bear reported visiting a park residence on each of a few days was the same bear.

There were a couple of noteworthy observations by park staff. In one instance a biologist was hiking along a road closed to public access, when he first heard animals “growling”, then saw a bear “jump on to” a small fir tree. Apparently the cause of this commotion was a mountain lion in the vegetation approximately 20 feet from the bear. On another occasion a park geologist observed a bear charging at a group of spike buck elk on a knoll in a prairie. This is the second observation in 2 consecutive years of a bear approaching an elk herd deliberately.

Incidents

Other than a bear hanging around the entrance to the Jedediah Smith Campground in early June, apparently causing concern to workers there and subsequently chased away by law enforcement rangers, there was just one major bear incident in RNSP in 2013.

On the morning of July 3, a park radio dispatcher was overheard saying that a bear had gotten into a tent in campsite 64 in Mill Creek Campground in Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park. The bear had entered the campsite and was able to get dog food (placed on a picnic table in a plastic bag) and entered a tent which was stocked with food, then smashed the tent. No humans were harmed. Two law enforcement rangers initially responded, followed by NPS biological technicians and a wildlife biologist. A California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) biologist was contacted who stated that CDFW would not support relocation of the bear outside the campground. The RNSP Bear Management Guidelines were consulted, and staff proceeded to post signs, work with the camp hosts to inform the campers of the situation, issue citations for food storage violations, and begin hazing the bear. The campground was full due to the Fourth of July holiday.

The bear was using a dry seasonal creek bed in the middle of the campground to travel between campsites. The creek bed was bounded by, and plugged with, a lot of vegetation (salmon berries and stinging nettles) which the bear was able to use for cover. The bear did not run away when people went near it.

In the early afternoon of that same day, the bear returned to campsite 64 and was sniffing around the damaged tent. The bear, estimated to weigh about 100 lbs., was hazed at close range with paintballs. The bear was also sprayed with pepper spray when it began climbing a tree, and hazed again with paintballs when it came through a culvert in the small creek bed it was using for travel. This was the last time the bear was seen by the biologists this day.

On July 4, the technicians returned to the campground early in the morning and learned the bear had returned to the campground around 6:00 p.m. the previous evening, and was chased away by rangers who also issued several more citations for improper food storage.

The bear was seen the morning of July 4 as it traveled between campsites. The technicians gave chase and the bear crossed the west branch of Mill Creek, disappearing into the forest on the other side of the creek and out of the campground. The bear apparently had fled from some campers that morning as well. Staff returned to the campground on the morning of July 5, and after several hours walking around with no sign of the bear, left. To our knowledge the bear was not seen in the campground again, indicating that hazing was successful in scaring it away.

Confrontations

Two minor confrontations took place in 2013. In early May a bear was visiting the Gold Bluffs Beach housing area, sniffing around trash cans and coming around at dinner time when residents were cooking. There are often one or two bears that show up at the residence each year. As far as is known, the bear did not get a food reward or become a nuisance.

In June, a timber company worker on foot in the Lower Coyote Creek Prairie was approached by a bear that did not run off when “shooed”, causing the man to be concerned for his safety. This was the only information provided regarding this encounter.

MEETINGS

The Bear Panel, which did not convene in 2011 or 2012, was resurrected and met in November 2013. Meeting notes are attached to this report as Appendix B.

EDUCATION

Bear safety and reporting orientations were given to seasonal RNSP interpreters and a Youth Conservation Corps crew. Numerous informal contacts were made with RNSP personnel regarding bear-garbage and bear-human issues. The RNSP Interpretation staff also informed visitors about basic bear safety during campfire programs and at the beginning of various interpretive programs and hikes at RNSP.

Bear Management Guidelines

During the bear incident in Mill Creek Campground it became apparent that the 1997 revision of the RNSP Bear Management Guidelines was in need of updating. The guidelines were revised in 2013 and signed by the RNSP Superintendents in January 2014.

FUNDING

Oil spill mitigation funds were again made available to replace worn out animal-proof equipment. Six additional food storage lockers were purchased in 2013.

MORTALITIES AND HARVEST

There were no known bear mortalities within RNSP in 2013. As of the writing of this report, California Department of Fish and Wildlife has not published the Bear Take Report for 2013. However, by the end of 2012, hunters returned 1,839 black bear tags to the state.

FY 2014 PRIORITIES

- ❖ Investigate all reports of “nuisance” bears immediately.
- ❖ Continue use of the RNSP Intranet (RNSP News and InsideREDW) for effective communication regarding bear management issues.
- ❖ All employees, contractors, etc., will be encouraged to turn in bear observations immediately.
- ❖ Install new bear-proof food storage lockers at the Little Bald Hills Horse Camp and assess the condition of lockers and trash receptacles at other back-country camps, front-country campgrounds, and picnic areas.

Prepared by: Kristin Schmidt, Wildlife Biologist

Reference: Redwood National and State Parks. 2013. Bear management guidelines. 29 pp.

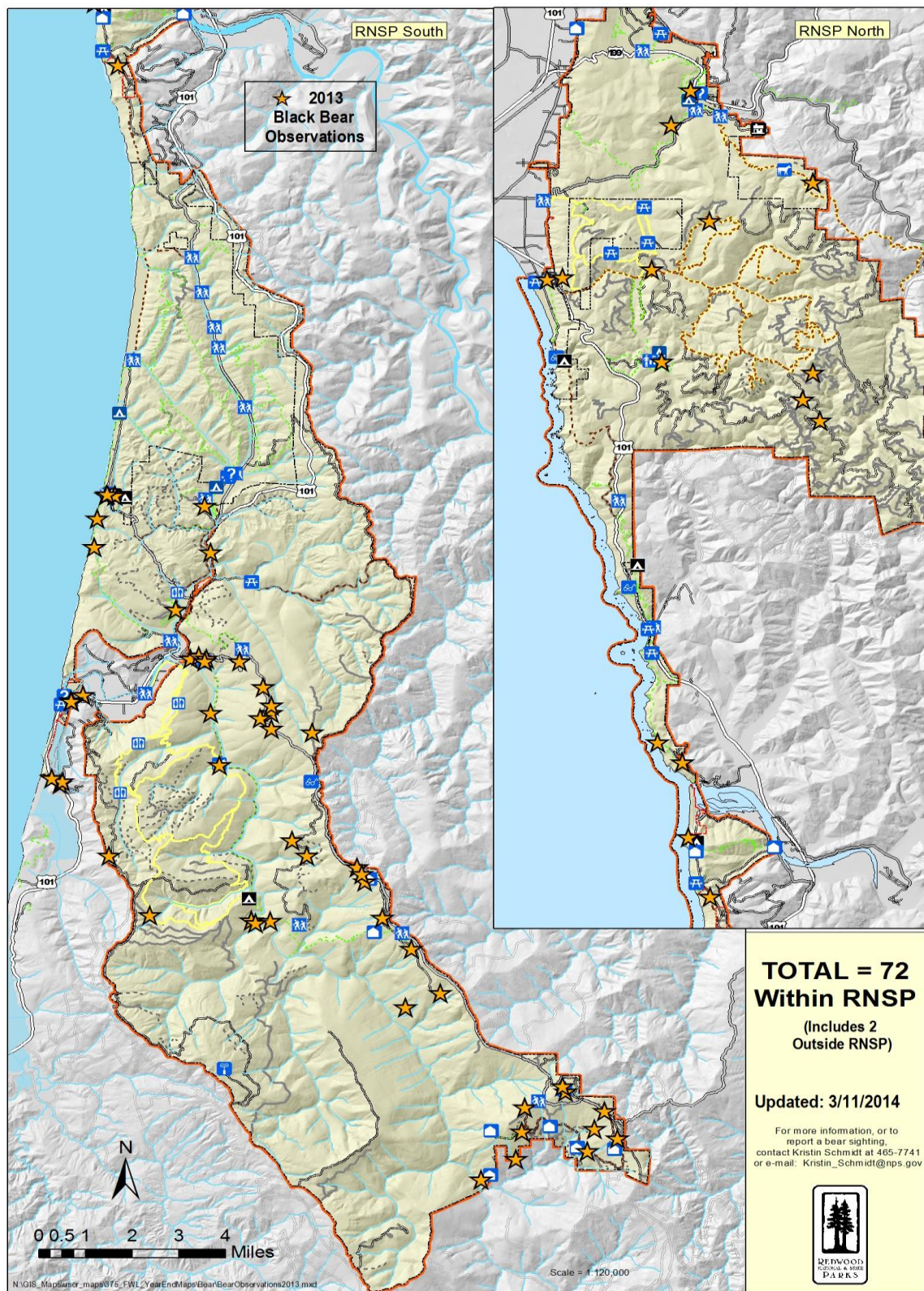


Figure 2. 2013 black bear observation locations in Redwood National and State Parks.

Appendix A. Date, number of bears, activity, and general location of bears reported to RNSP during 2013.

Date	# Bears	Activity	Location
1/3/2013	1	Foraging, walking, crossed the trail twice.	Tall Trees Trail, steep hill.
1/5/2013	1	Crossing road.	Requa Road, near overlook.
4/8/2013	1	None given.	Tall Trees Trail.
4/22/2013	1	Feeding on side of road, then running away.	C-Line Road (Tall Trees Road).
4/26/2013	1	None given.	Wolf Creek Education Center, on road to WCEC.
4/29/2013	4	None given.	Lyons Ranch Trail.
4/29/2013	1	Grazing.	Counts Hill Prairie.
5/1/2013	1	Climbing a tree.	Gold Bluffs Beach resident housing.
5/1/2013	1	None given.	Tall Trees Grove.
5/2/2013	1	Sniffing around trash cans.	Gold Bluffs Beach resident housing.
5/3/2013	1	Ran across road.	Alder Camp Road.
5/4/2013	1	Came around while employees were cooking.	Gold Bluffs Beach resident housing.
5/6/2013	1	Foraging in briars.	Klamath River Overlook.
5/7/2013	1	Running across road.	Highway 101, just south of park boundary (Freshwater).
5/8/2013	1	Foraging.	Coyote Rock.
5/13/2013	1	Walking through prairie, heard vehicle and crossed Bald Hills Road going north.	Elk Camp Prairie.
5/13/2013	1	Foraging.	Marshy pond across Highway 101 from Kuchel Visitor Center.
5/14/2013	1	Running into bushes.	Flint Ridge Trailhead.
5/21/2013	1	None given.	Redwood Creek.
5/22/2013	1	Running across road.	Newton B. Drury Parkway, 1 mile south of Prairie Creek Visitor Center.
5/25/2013	1	Walking across road.	Crescent Beach Education Center (CBEC).
5/25/2013	1	Walking near staff residence area.	Espa Lagoon, near riparian.
5/30/2013	1	Walking towards Gold Bluffs resident housing.	Gold Bluffs Beach, near kiosk.
6/4/2013	1	Entering Jed Smith Campground, rangers chased it away.	Jed Smith Campground.
6/11/2013	1	Foraging, running.	Jed Smith, Mill Creek Trail.
6/12/2013	1	Running from vehicle on road, then bailed off road.	Mill Creek area, Teran Road.
6/13/2013	1	None given	Elam Horse Camp.
6/17/2013	3	Not running off when shooed.	Lower Coyote Creek Prairie, near Dooleyville.
6/17/2013	1	Walking.	Lyons Ranch.

Date	# Bears	Activity	Location
6/19/2013	1	Walking on road.	C-Line Road (Tall Trees Road).
6/20/2013	1	Running through prairie.	Ranch Road.
6/20/2013	1	Ran across road.	Near Coyote Rock.
6/20/2013	1	Running down road.	West Side Access Road, north of A-9 deck.
6/22/2013	1	Walking.	Freshwater Lagoon, bank.
6/23/2013	1	Walking along bluffs and into coastal shrubs.	Gold Bluffs Beach between Skunk Cabbage Trail and southern fisherman's gate.
6/24/2013	2	Running across road.	C-Line Road (Tall Trees Road).
6/24/2013	2	Standing in grass off roadside.	Bald Hills Road, 1.2 miles up from Highway 101 junction.
6/24/2013	1	Walking.	Gold Bluffs Beach, kiosk.
6/25/2013	1	Road, running.	Freshwater Lagoon, south.
6/25/2013	1	Laying and walking around.	Elk Camp Prairie.
6/27/2013	2	Walking downhill on road.	Bald Hills Road.
6/27/2013	1	Charging young elk.	Coyote Creek drainage.
7/1/2013	1	Running on road.	Old Highway 101.
7/1/2013	1	Running down road.	One mile past A-9 Deck on A-9-9 Deck.
7/2/2013	2	Alongside of Bald Hills Road.	Bald Hills Road.
7/3/2013	1	Running around, getting food in campground.	Mill Creek Campground.
7/9/2013	1	Ran off road.	K & K Road end.
7/9/2013	1	Foraging.	Elk Camp Prairie.
7/9/2013	1	Road, running.	K & K Road.
7/9/2013	1	Road, running.	K & K Road.
7/11/2013	1	Sitting in prairie.	Gans Prairie.
7/13/2013	1	Sunning.	School House Peak.
7/16/2013	2	Climbing tree.	Gans Prairie.
7/17/2013	1	Foraging.	Little Bald Hills.
7/17/2013	1	Foraging along ridge.	Little Bald Hills.
7/18/2013	2	Walking off road.	Bald Hills Road between Lady Bird Johnson Grove and Gans Prairie.
7/24/2013	1	Foraging on berries while walking up slope.	Skunk Cabbage Trail & Coastal Trail junction.
7/28/2013	1	None given.	C-Line Road (Tall Trees Access Road).
8/1/2013	1	Foraging across meadow edge.	Crescent Beach Educational Center (CBEC) Meadow.

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Appendix B.

FALL 2013 BEAR PANEL MEETING NOTES

Present: Samantha Cowan, Maunda Hagan, Terry Hines, Dave Keltner, Ben Littlefield, Kyle Max, Aida Parkinson, Dave Roemer, Kristin Schmidt, Amber Transou, Jim Wheeler, Carol Wilson

Panel's Purpose

Kristin provided a short synopsis of past bear panel activities; Aida provided copies of the original Bear Management Guidelines/Environmental Assessment and subsequent revisions.

It was agreed that the “duties” of the panel as outlined in the current Bear Management Guidelines are relevant to the newly formed group. They include: resolving operational problems with food storage and trash/recycling equipment; identifying funding priorities for trash/recycling bins, food storage devices, and sign materials; ensuring educational materials are appropriate and available; and reviewing bear incidents.

Dave Roemer stated that the Management Team (MT) is in support of the panel and concerned about incidents with large mammals in the parks. If at some point we decide we need additional representation on the panel, e.g., a South District CSP law enforcement ranger, Dave will take this to the management team.

This group ideally will become the “Large Animal Panel” dealing with bears, lions, and elk management issues. But for now we will focus on bears. We also agreed to meet twice per year, prior to and at the end of visitor season to review the program and guidelines, and ensure that signs and bear-proof equipment are all in good condition.

Public and Employee Information

New employee packets currently do not include information on working in bear country. Interpretation and Resources staff present information on bears and other large mammals to seasonal park aides and rangers during orientation/training. The annual seasonal law enforcement ranger training has fallen by the wayside. Amber stated the CSP District Resources staff need an orientation packet that includes information on working in bear country, how to report bear observations, and to whom observations should be reported.

RPA employees staffing visitor centers also should have training related to working around bears and reporting bear observations, and be provided with accurate information for visitors.

Ben stated seasonal maintenance workers often don't know how to operate bear-proof trash cans and could use some help with that, along with information about who should be contacted if cans are broken and need replacing.

Action: Develop a form (2 pages max.) for Admin (both CSP and NPS) to provide to new employees that includes information about what to do when in bear country, safety information (bears, lions, and elk), and how to report relevant wildlife information. Have employees sign that they have read it and understand it. Also probably should resurrect orientation for new LE rangers. Ensure seasonal employees are trained on how to operate trash cans, etc.

Visitor Guide: From the November MT Notes, "The Visitor Guide will be revised for the Spring and all MT members are encouraged to submit material to Candace." The current guide does not mention bears specifically, so we need to work with Nate St. Amand and Michael Glore to craft bear, lion, and elk safety messages for the guide. It was suggested that we put the message in a "calendar" format that lets visitors know what to expect from big mammals at any given time of year. This could be organized by seasons. Besides the Visitor Guide similar information should be posted on the RNSP Facebook page with visuals and short text. A video with similar information also could be posted on YouTube. All of these media sources are used by potential park visitors; they all should alert people to the fact that bears occur here and what to do to be safe in bear country.

Participant Guides at Outdoor Schools: Participant Guides are still available and the information contained within is also presented at teacher/parent orientation.

Signs: Rather than a lot of signage, visitors entering campgrounds are best served at entrance stations where they are talked to by a ranger about bears and proper food storage. They then must sign the back of their fee receipt indicating they agree to abide by what they've been told.

Action: Dave K. will talk to Brett Silver about conducting orientation for seasonal campground staff so they deliver a consistent message. Kristin will make sure this item is included in the management guidelines.

We do need to figure out which of the 7 signs/stickers previously deployed under the management guidelines we want to keep using, redesign, etc., and where they should be placed. We decided this was work for a subcommittee in another meeting. The subcommittee will include Ben, Amber, Terry, Maunda, and Kristin. Once the group has landed on selected signs, Dave Roemer will take the subcommittee's recommendations to the MT for approval.

Action: Kristin will send out a Doodle Poll in December to schedule a January meeting.

2013 Bear Incident

Dave K. provided a summary of what happened on the morning of July 3rd, when he received a call that a bear had broken into an occupied tent in Mill Creek campground. Due to poor communication because of technical difficulties (poor radio contact and no cell phone coverage) the rangers did not know the specifics of what was happening. It turned out the tent was “occupied” by a lot of food, not people. The bear was hazed by rangers and wildlife staff and eventually left the campground.

We recognize that camp hosts are our first line of defense when it comes to bear issues. Kristin is working on a brief information document that should help camp hosts deliver messages to visitors regarding how to be safe around bears, elk, and lions.

Hazing

The panel discussed different types of hazing; there was some disagreement about what visitors should do to haze a bear, or be safe, if a bear enters a campsite. The draft guidelines currently state that visitors or untrained personnel should make noise by shouting or banging pots and pans to scare away a bear. Brochures also recommend making noise as do our temporary signs posted in areas with bear activity. Dave K. suggested visitors be told to take shelter in a vehicle, however, there may not always be a vehicle close by.

There were numerous reports of bears in and around Mill Creek campground this past summer, reported to wildlife staff but not necessarily to law enforcement. It was agreed that in the future any bear activity in a campground, around a trailhead or along a trail, or near park facilities should trigger ranger notification so they are alert to this fact.

Action: Kristin will change the guidelines to specify this notification requirement.

Pepper Spray

Terry described how we have been “under the radar” with use of bear spray up to his point. To date, the only employees in the national park authorized to use pepper spray are enforcement rangers and Fish and Wildlife Branch staff who have been trained in its use. Presently, pepper spray is not government-issued PPE in the national park, and is mainly used as an aversive conditioning tool by trained staff.

Dave K. supports any employee having bear spray as government-issued PPE, after going through training on its use. However, employees, except for law enforcement and Fish and Wildlife staff, should not be using pepper spray, including personal property, for aversive conditioning. If employees are allowed to carry pepper spray as PPE, Terry wondered where the money would come from to pay for it. As park practitioner, Terry would have to keep an inventory log and training records for NPS employees.

Amber noted that CSP makes bear spray training and use available to all resource staff.

Action: Kristin will edit the guidelines so the differences between current NPS and CSP policies in the use of pepper spray are noted.

Maintenance

Food locker/trash can inventory

Kristin mentioned the inventory spreadsheets that have previously been used to document the condition of the bear-proof equipment in the parks. The question is, are these still being used and if not, should they be?

Amber stated she would prefer that this information be recorded using a digital field recorder along with GPS coordinates to document locations of the devices. This is what is done at Humboldt Redwoods.

Action: Amber will talk with Chris Butz to see if he wants to use these units in the partnership parks.

This will be a topic for the panel during the next meeting.

Next Meeting- Late April or Early May 2014.