Ten bears removed from Long Beach Peninsula town, Five Euthanized

Local News

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OLYMPIA — Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) officers and biologists last week removed 10 black bears that had been fed by people from the town of Oysterville, on the Long Beach Peninsula in Pacific County.

Five of the bears — female adults and cubs — were relocated to Mount Rainier National Park. Another five were so dangerously habituated to people that they were euthanized. Meat from the euthanized bears was donated to an area food program.

“I hope we never have to do anything like this again,” said WDFW Enforcement Sgt. Dan Chadwick, who helped coordinate the bear removal in response to public-safety concerns about the growing number of bears in the area.

“I’ve never seen such a concentration of bears in such a small area. It was completely unnatural and it was caused by people feeding wild animals,” Chadwick said.

A bear that learns to associate people with food is a potentially dangerous bear, and cannot be relocated in the wild, Chadwick said.

"We can’t risk human life by releasing a bear that would cause problems for other people,” he said. “A fed bear is a dead bear. We keep trying to communicate that, to try to prevent situations like this one.”

The Oysterville bear-feeding situation apparently had been going on for some time before a complaint was made, according to WDFW officers. Most, if not all, the bear feeding was conducted at one residence. The residents told WDFW officers they were spending $4,000 a year on dog food to feed the bears.

Neighbors reported they became concerned when more and more bears showed up looking for food. The bears were so familiar around people that when a WDFW officer arrived on the scene, one of the bears crawled into the cab of his pick-up truck, said WDFW Deputy Chief Mike Cenci.

“This was a tragedy for wildlife,” said Cenci. “We were obligated to act to prevent a human tragedy as well.”