**SOUTHEASTERN ASOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES**

**WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**Large Carnivore Working Group Report 2021**

Dan Gibbs (TWRA), Maria Davidson (LDWF)

Meeting of July 27, 2021

**Meeting convened:** 10:30 am (eastern)

**Chaired:** Dan Gibbs (TN), Maria Davidson (LA)

**Location:** Due to travel restriction this meeting was held via Zoom and replaced the scheduled Spring Meeting

**Attendance:**

Members: Kenny Ribbeck (LA), Dave Telesco (FL), Richard Rummel (MS), Dan Gibbs (TN), Colleen Olfenbuttel (NC), Nelson LaFonne (VA), Carl Tugend (VA), Brian Grice (AL), Tammy Waldrop (SC), Laura Conlee (MO), John Hast (KY), Laura Palmer (KY), Jeff Ford (OK), Myron Means (AR), Maria Davidson (LA), Colin Carpenter (WV).

Guests: LaVonne Ewing (Image Resource), Linda Masterson (Image Resource), Sarah Yoder

**Discussion Items:**

BearWise®: (more detailed information on BearWise can be found in the attachments.

The first half of the day was spent with Dan, LaVonne, and Linda leading a discussion on BearWise. The following was discussed:

1. **Review of major changes and activities related to the site**. **Highlights include:**
   1. Currently have 1298 email subscribers with an open rate of 48%-55%. This is considered a very high rate.
   2. Six articles were created and added to article bank.
   3. State branded flyers were created as requested by member states.
   4. New banners created.
2. **Reviewed Google analytics and usage.** Visits continue to grow. Compared to the 2nd quarter of last year; Users, new users, sessions, and page views have increased between 167% and 185%. Most popular pages in 2nd quarter were:
   1. Home Page d. Bear Safety Tips – Keep Bears Out
   2. About Black Bears e. Bear Safety Tips – Hiking and Camping
   3. Bear Safety Tips – Bear Encounters f. BearWise Store
3. **BearWise Store created and launched in March 2020.** This was a goal that was set early on when BearWise was first discussed. The purpose is to make educational materials readily available to the public. This ensures that the BearWise message is being distributed properly. Guests have options of free downloads as well as purchasing bulk orders. A portion of the bulk orders has begun generating a small amount of revenue for the site.

The store now has 7 categories. There are multiple physical products for sale including stickers, magnets, flyers, banners, etc. Nine digital downloadable products (free) are available.

As of June 30, 2021, the store has had 17,600+ visitors and 16,200+ product views. Most states are represented in the 1,200+ orders9mostly free downloads)

Visitors include:

State Parks USDA Forest Service National Park Service

State WL Agencies Universities Towns/Cities

Realtors Community Bear Groups Libraries

HOA’s Scouts/4H Homeschool Families

Resorts Rental Property Mgrs. Campgrounds

As of June 2021, $1,504 have been earned in royalties from store sales.

1. **Reviewed BearWise Name & Logo Usage Guidelines (attached).** BearWise and the BearWise logo are registered Trademarks, and it is important to protect the Trademark by having and enforcing guidelines regarding their usage. BearWise reviewed several materials in which non-state agencies wanted to utilize BearWise messaging.
2. **Social Media:** Social Media efforts have resulted in BearWise being able to engage people that state wildlife agencies typically don’t have access to. The attached report includes social media analytics for quarters 1 & 2 of 2021.
3. **BearWise Recognition Program.** Signage has been developed (see attached report) to recognize Businesses, Communities, and Schools that have met minimum guidelines (set by their respective state). The BearWise site will be updated with info regarding this opportunity soon.
4. **Discussed potential AFWA transition, timing, and amount of the next contract with Image Resource should AFWA decline.** AFWA is still considering taking over the BearWise program to allow participation by all AFWA members. A webinar was presented in May to inform other states about BearWise. AFWA is currently surveying membership to gauge support. Given that AFWA leadership will not decide until September, the LCWG will propose a contract for the full year of 2022. Once AFWA makes its final decision, an amended action item may be presented at the WRC meeting.
   1. The proposed SEAFA BearWise Budget for January 1, 2022 – December 30, 2022 is $47,000. This is the same as 2021 except that an additional $5,000 has been budgeted to allow BearWise to be represented at the 6th International Human Bear Conflicts Workshop to be held in Nevada. Note: As of the end of June, $1,504 have been earned in royalties, if this trend continues, there should be a significant amount in royalties to cover this added expense.

Black Bear Resistant Product Testing Protocol:

The group was brought up to speed regarding SEAFWA testing program. A subcommittee to have oversight of the program has been selected with Dave Telesco (FL) and Jim LaCour (LA) serving as co-chairs. An update is attached.

State Update Highlights:

1. Multiple states are developing and preparing to implement formal BearWise Recognition programs. (FL, NC, TN)
2. Missouri has designated 3 Bear hunt zones and set quotas for 2021
3. LA has completed their multi-year hair snare research
4. Some states are seeing cases of mange
5. Alabama and Virginia have new members to the LCWG. (see member list)

2022 LCWG Meeting: Currently, Wisconsin is planning to host the Eastern Black Bear Workshop April 26-28, 2022 in Tomahawk, WI. The LCWG will have its annual meeting on April 25.

**Action Item and Recommendation:**

(Pending decision by AFWA regarding BearWise.) approval of the new contract with Image Resource to manage BearWise.org. This contract will be valid from January 1, 2022 – December 30, 2022.

**Working Group Recommendation for Chair:**

No change. Dan Gibbs (TWRA) and Maria Davidson (LDWF) co-chairs

**Meeting Adjourned:** 4:00 pm (eastern)

**List of Current Working Group Members:** See Attached

**Submitted By:** Dan Gibbs and Maria Davidson

Attachments: 2021 LCWG Activity Summary BearWise Budget 2022

LCWG Membership List BearWise Year Recap thru June 30, 2021