

Gail Tunberg
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Southwestern Region
Albuquerque, New Mexico

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Interviewer: Sheila Poole

Gail Tunberg (GT): My name is Gail Tunberg and I'm the regional wildlife program leader for the southwestern region of the Forest Service here in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Sheila Poole (SP): Gail, why is the Bear Aware Program around, and how is it helping locally rather than just the national policy perspective?

GT: The Be Bear Aware Program has had a nice history, especially here in the Southwest, where we've been experiencing an increasing amount of human/wildlife interactions, particularly with people and black bears as they visit the national forests. The program is national; it has elements from the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, which we thank for providing many of the materials. Unfortunately those materials feature grizzly bears, and here in the Southwest our public will only meet a black bear. It might be brown, but it is still just a black bear, and there are differences in how those bears behave and how we, when we encounter them, should also behave in order to be safe out there. So that's why we've developed some materials recently just featuring black bears for those parts of the United States and those local areas where only black bears can be found.

SP: How does the program tie in with the Forest Service mission, and also Gifford Pinchot's philosophy?

GT: Well Gifford Pinchot was a great educator, and he truly believed that in order for us to do our jobs on the landscape, that it was each of our employees' responsibility to also help the public understand what we do and why we do it in order to manage their public lands. Because these are indeed their public land. We share them with all Americans. Part of his message then was to get a conservation education type component to the public. If there were things the public didn't understand about what we were doing, our job was to go out and help them understand what that was. Much of what we do with the Be Bear Aware Program is just that. We go into communities and classrooms, youth groups such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, to help teach them not only about the biology of the bear, but also how they can their families can be safe when they're visiting the national forests/.

SP: Okay. You have with you the exhibit and the materials for Bear Aware. If the Bear Aware Program was exhibited on the National Mall, how would you interact the program with the children and the adults to get them more acquainted with the program?

GT: I think this exhibit and the materials that we have would be a lot of fun there on the Mall. They have trees on the edges of the Mall which we could always go to, to hang packs for example. We could teach the children and the public how to hang a pack from a tree, the proper way to store their food. We could talk to them about this sleeping arrangement of your tent, with a hundred yards between that and your campfire, and where you store your pack. We have materials available that are hands-on for children. Over a hundred million dollars is spent every year on messages similar to this, which just encourages the public to get close and closer to wildlife in order to have an enjoyable experience. And we know that that's just not true. And here's another one showing the public how to get close to grizzly bears when they're at Bear World. Here's one more for Wild Adventures. How to get close to wildlife and get better photographs when you're close to wildlife. So with the public getting these messages so frequently all the time, what can we do in order to help the public to understand that things like this, feeding wildlife, getting close to wildlife, are not good ideas, both for us and for wildlife. When we have the public visit us at national forests and grasslands, we want them to have a safe and enjoyable experience with their families. We want to teach them how to respect wildlife and still have a good time when they're visiting. If we could get this and get the display out onto the Mall, there's just a lot we could do for families and children out there that I think would be a lot of fun. And one of those would be to help them understand how to set up and maintain a clean camp. Not everyone knows how to throw a rock and a piece of rope over a tree limb and hang a pack properly so the bears can't access it. As well as not everyone knows, when they're tenting, how to pitch the tent, the correct locations that you might want to think about you're pitching a tent, what sorts of things you should have or not have in your tent when you're out camping. Plus people don't understand what things attract bears, and we could explain the types of foods and products, such as hairsprays, soaps and toothpaste that actually do attract bears and other wildlife to your camp. We could talk about fire ring; although we might not have fire in the fire ring, we could simulate that out on the Mall. Show them about where your cooking and eating needs to be kept very clean; not to burn garbage, to pack it out; to hang that garbage and anything left over from their meals in that safe location between the trees. We also have an instructor's guide that we use to teach you about the Be Bear Aware Program; just general hiking and safety when they're out in bear country. There's things in here such as how to identify a bear trail, where you would look for claw marks on trees, overturned rocks where they're foraging for food, stumps and logs that have been torn apart. And I think we could get all of those elements right there close to the booth on the Mall, that kids could come in and take a look at those things. We also have some backpacks that bears have helped themselves to unfortunately and torn apart; we have water bottles that bears have mouthed and punctured with their teeth, that could also be there just to show people what can happen if they don't have a safe camp.

The Be Bear Aware partnership is truly that. We have got the involvement, as you can see, with Arizona Department of Game and Fish, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, our Forest Service, the Center for Wildlife Information located in Montana, the National Forest Foundation, and our Nature Watch program in the Forest Service, have all joined together in the Be Bear Aware Program. That partnership has now expanded. We include the Wildlife Society, the Wildlife Management Institute, The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the Boone and Crockett Club, and Safari Club International, have all joined us in this effort to help get these materials out to the public.

These are some of the materials we've prepared for our Be Bear Aware Program across the nation. As I mentioned earlier the materials are black bear and grizzly bear, and now also include other wildlife species that our visitors might encounter when they're in the national forests and grasslands.

Just to start you off with these materials, this is a stewardship guide that we've developed. This helps the visitors understand the proper ways to view and photograph wildlife, at a distance, safely but enjoyably. So these are tips that we have available to them. For campgrounds and trailheads we developed two separate little stickers. These go right on signs, so you don't need to replace existing signs across the Forest Service system. We can just augment those signs with these little stickers. One goes on picnic tables. As one person told me, put it on the inside of the bathroom doors, because people have a lot of time to read right in there. So that's a good way to get the message across. We have little buttons like this that are educational buttons so the public can understand the difference between a grizzly bear and a black bear; it's got the key identification points right there on it. And of course our "I'm Bear Aware" sticker, which we have for the public and for kids. As they go through the program and learn how to be aware and be safe, they get a sticker to go home with. Also for young people we have coloring books. We have a Be Bear Aware coloring book. And we've come up with two editions for that. One is for the Western states where we have the high Rocky Mountains. The other one is for Eastern states where it's more gentle terrain. So we're featuring both kinds of forests that the public might find when they're out there. Here's one that features camping in grizzly bear country for the public. We also have, for those groups, and these are mostly for outfitter guide groups or recreation groups, we have bear spray videos. These are instructional videos to help them understand how to use bear pepper spray, and to understand what is and is not an acceptable formula for bear pepper spray as a deterrent if a black bear or a grizzly bear does attack. Also we have the North American Wildlife

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The national spokesperson for the Be Bear Aware and Wildlife Stewardship Campaign is General Norman Schwarzkopf. He's known as The Bear, and he so strongly believes in the message that we are trying to convey with the program that he has offered up his services and time, free to us, for the Be Bear Aware Wildlife Stewardship Program. This is our stewardship guide, which features across North America variety of species, because people might encounter prairie dogs and not know how to approach or what not to do when they're around prairie dogs. Scorpions, rattlesnakes, even alligators, which you will find on some of our national forests and grasslands. All of these materials here that I'm showing you we could pass out and have available at the Mall. We have for our homeowners, here's one for summer homeowners and residential homeowners that we developed, that gives them safety tips on, in their cabin, what they can and can't do. For example, a lot of people didn't know they needed to be bringing in their barbeque grills and their hummingbird feeders at night, because those will attract bears. For those hikers, we have a brochure specifically designed for them, for what to do, safety tips for when they're out hiking in the forest. It includes much of the material that we have on the display there in an easy format for them to take home with them. These also make great projects for science classes and schoolrooms. These materials are highly useful in that way. Here's one that's just a general program on Be Bear Aware and wildlife stewardship for throughout the

United States. And this one we developed here in the Southwest that features red rock scenery as well as prickly pear cactus and other species that you'll find here in the Southwest, because a lot of our visitors, we've discovered, do not know that you can find bears in the desert. And we certainly know that that's true and that they can be found there. Another thing that we have are some videos that can be made available there at the Mall for the public to take home and view. How to Keep Wildlife Wild. How to be safe. Again, when you're viewing wildlife and taking photographs in the wild.

This is a poster that we developed for the public to see when they enter bear country, just to make them aware that they are entering bear country, with real easy to understand and follow safety tips for them while they're out there.

There's nothing like youth to attract youth to a display or a venue, so I think it would just be great to have some of the students who helped design these exhibits for example, join us on the Mall. Another partner that we have are Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America, that have a safety patch that they actually wear on their uniforms. That's the Be Bear Aware safety patch. They could join us on the Mall to help us teach the other visitors to this area and this display about Be Bear Aware and wildlife safety.

END OF INTERVIEW