



Case study: Bear Baiting

“Bear baiting” refers to the practice of hunting black bears over bait. In preparation for a hunt, hunters or outfitters place food at a location to which they hope to lure bears. After bears learn to return to the site, hunters harvest their prey from nearby tree stands or blinds. Hunting black bears over bait is legal in Alaska and eight other states. Proponents contend that the practice allows observation of the bear at close range, minimizing the possibility of shooting a female with cubs, and maximizing the likelihood of a clean kill. Opponents contend that bear baiting is unsportsmanlike.

Hunters in Alaska are required to register baiting stations and to post a permit at the site. A person may register and maintain two baiting stations at a time. Alaska hunting regulations state that baiting stations may not be located within one-quarter mile of a publicly maintained road, trail, the Alaska Railroad, or the shorelines of nine specifically named rivers. Additionally, stations must be at least one mile from any residence, seasonally occupied cabin, developed recreational facility, or campground. In most of the State the hunting season begins in mid-April and ends in mid-June. Hunters must remove bait, litter (including contaminated soil), and equipment from the bait station site after their hunt (Alaska Legal Resource Center 2006).

Hunters must report locations of their baiting stations on the State registration form. However, Alaska regulations establish no accuracy standard for the locations hunters report. In practice, location information ranges from GPS coordinates to vague verbal descriptions (e.g. “three miles up the North Fork of the West River”).

Neither do State regulations provide a definition of “publicly maintained trail.” The State of Alaska contains vast tracts of public lands. Many trails in the State are informal routes with no legal easement or public right-of-way status. Utility easements and rivers are also commonly used for public access.

While most of the state remains rural, the urban-rural interface is expanding in Alaska, and resource use conflicts are increasingly common. Aromatic food at baiting stations attracts both black and brown bears. While there are no known cases of non-hunters being attacked near a baiting station, Alaskan hunters over bait have been charged and mauled by brown bears (McDonough 2009).

Concerned about the risks to public safety and welfare posed by bear baiting, a citizens group has recently petitioned the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to require hunters to specify bait station locations with GPS coordinates. The group also insists that the Department release the location data to the public. Hunters groups that object to the new requirement as an unnecessary invasion of privacy are applying political pressure at the State capitol to ignore the petition. The legislature orders the Department Director to appear at a hearing about the issue.

The Director asks the manager of the Department’s GIS unit, among others, for advice about the feasibility and potential consequences of proposed new requirement. As a certified GIS Professional, the manager knows that GPS positioning is a common feature of the mobile phones that most hunters carry. Collecting and reporting precise location data would not pose an undue

burden. The station data could be mapped easily, and shared readily with regulators, enforcement personnel, and the public. However, the manager also knows that bear baiting is controversial. In addition to allowing hikers and other non-hunters to avoid baiting stations, publication of specific location information could also lead to destruction of hunters' private property. It might also lead to unauthorized used of baiting stations by other hunters.

What should the GIS Professional advise the Department Director to do?

References

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (2010) Online Bear Baiting Clinic. Retrieved 10 April 2010 from <http://www.wc.adfg.state.ak.us/index.cfm?adfg=bearbaiting.main>

Alaska Legal Resource Center (2006) Title 5 Alaska Administrative Code 92.044: Permit for hunting black bear with the use of bait or scent Retrieved 10 April 2010 from <http://www.touchngo.com/lglcntr/akstats/aac/title05/chapter092/section044.htm>

McDonough, Thomas, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (2009) Personal communication.

Resources for educators

Suggested discussion points, relevant GISCI Rules of Conduct, and further resources related to this case study are available on request. Send request to David DiBiase (dibiase@psu.edu) along with contact information (including your position and affiliation) and a brief description of how you plan to use the case.

Suggested citation: Spahn, Margaret (2009) Case Study: Bear Baiting. GISProfessional Ethics Project <http://gisprofessionalethics.org>

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