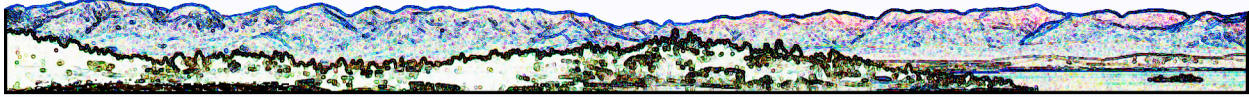


Swan View Coalition

Nature and Human Nature on the Same Path



3165 Foothill Road, Kalispell, MT 59901

swanview.org & swanrange.org

ph/fax 406-755-1379

July 25, 2019

Matt Hogan- IGBC Chair
US Fish and Wildlife Service
PO Box 25486
Denver, CO 80225-0486

Leanne Marten
Regional Forester (R-1)
26 Fort Missoula Road
Missoula, MT 59804

Re: Supervisor Weber Misleading in Plea for Forum on Human-Bear Risks

Sent via email to Matt_Hogan@fws.gov with cc to Ellen Davis, ellendavis@fs.fed.us

And to leanne.marten@usda.gov

Dear Mr. Hogan and Ms. Marten;

Flathead Forest Supervisor Chip Weber seriously misled the IGBC at its June 25 meeting when asking it to "convene or at least participate in, a broader examination of the risks that occur for both when humans intersect with wildlife." Mr. Weber misrepresented the relative risks of hiking, mountain biking and trail running in order to make it appear as though the former has a higher risk of bear-cause human death than the latter two, while also implying these relative risks have not already been evaluated. We urge the IGBC to look into the false premise upon which Mr. Weber has based his request and to recognize that issuing commercial special use permits for trail running races and mountain bike races negates interagency efforts to teach the public to behave more responsibly in bear habitat.

1. In his written statement to the IGBC, Mr. Weber used Wikipedia data to claim that 29 people have been killed by bears while hiking or walking in the past 30 years, while only 5 have been killed by bears while running or mountain biking. [1] Mr. Weber failed to adjust those statistics to be proportional to the frequency of the recreation type - rendering his comparison meaningless at best and deceptive at worst. In Flathead County, for example, visitors participate in hiking 14 times more often than mountain biking. [2]

2. Had he instead read to the IGBC the opening paragraphs of the Board of Review's Recommendations following the death of Brad Treat when he slammed into a grizzly bear while mountain biking at high speed, Mr. Weber would have noted that researchers in Banff National Park found that "the number of encounters between bikers and bears was disproportionately high" compared to hikers. [3]

3. Had he read further from those Recommendations, Mr. Weber would have noted that increased speeds associated with running and hiking "increase the odds of surprise encounters at close distances and surprised bears are more likely to be aggressive." [3]

4. Had Mr. Weber read from the Board of Review's Report on the death of Brad Treat, the IGBC would have learned from the errors in judgment that contributed to Mr. Treat's death. Most importantly, he was biking at a high rate of speed around a blind corner in a trail he knew was frequented by bears, making it impossible for him to avoid colliding with the bear. [4]

5. Instead, Mr. Weber read to you from a statement made by Mr. Treat's widow, claiming "Both Brad and the bear were doing the right thing, at the right time, in the right place." [5]

Mr. Weber has since issued a guest editorial in which he essentially calls for the public to consider all recreational risks and consequences to be equal. [6] He makes it sound like consistently urging people to not bike fast is the same thing as saying they can't bike at all, falsely framing the issue as "all or nothing." He also fails to note that, when someone drowns while whitewater rafting, the government doesn't drain the river - but when a person tangles with a bear, it has lead to the government killing the bear.

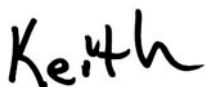
Mr. Weber has engaged in a red herring attempt to abandon statistical and scientific integrity in favor of a romantic glorification of risk. He is essentially ignoring and negating the findings and advice of the interagency Board of Review, which included two members of his staff. We urge the IGBC to not follow Mr. Weber down this path.

Wildlife biologist Rick Sinnott writes that Brad Treat is only one among five mountain bikers that broadsided a bear in the eighteen bike-bear incidents he reviewed. [7] He and the Board of Review cite to substantial research and case studies upon which recommendations for minimizing risk are based.

The government has played a necessary role in improving transportation safety without outlawing automobiles, in part by recognizing that when someone drives drunk it is others that are maimed or killed. We urge the IGBC to keep this in mind when considering the government's role in consistently advising people to slow down while mountain biking so they don't collide with bears - which would also help reduce bike collisions with horses or other people.

We ask that you or your IGBC Executive Coordinator forward this letter to all members of the IGBC so they can review it prior to any action being taken by the IGBC in these matters. Thank you all for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Keith J. Hammer also signed for: Brian Peck, Independent Wildlife Consultant
Chair keith@swanview.org glrbear@centurytel.net

Cc: Ellen Davis, IGBC Executive Coordinator, ellendavis@fs.fed.us

References

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