

Earl's Pearls

Smokey speaks of Teddy

by Earl Higgins

On recent evening, a sharp-eyed Delta Sierran reporter spotted Smokey the Bear in an unusual locale. Smokey was celebrating the anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans (which coincides with Elvis's birthday) at Mid-City Lanes, New Orleans' funky nightclub bowling alley. Smokey was a little disappointed in his poor performance in the Elvis look-alike contest, but he agreed to an interview over a cold bottle of Dixie.

DELTA SIERRAN: You're back, Smokey. What brings you to the deep delta country again?

SMOKEY THE BEAR: Teddy. And I'm not talkin' about the senator from Massachusetts. In case you don't know it, the original Teddy bear was from Louisiana. He got the name from the first — maybe the only — environmental president we've ever had. I want everyone to know that there is legislation pending to put the Louisiana Black Bear on the Endangered Species List.

D.S.: You sound disappointed with Mr. Bush, he who proclaimed himself "The Environmental President."

S.T.B.: Lemme tell you something, Bubba. If he's The Environmental President, I ain't got a hair on my butt. Tomorrow I'm giving a speech to the AFL/CIO with political message that Mr. Environmental President won't like.

D.S.: Since when are you involved with organized labor?

S.T.B.: I'm not. This is organized reptiles, the Alligators Federation of Louisiana / Crocodiles International Order. They're an anti-belt, anti-shoes lobbying group. I'm going to tell them why I supported David Duke for governor of Louisiana.

D.S.: You did? You don't look like a Nazi to me. Or, for that matter, you don't even look like a white man.

S.T.B.: David Duke would have done wonders for the environment of Louisiana had become governor. In the first place, he wouldn't have been here much because he would be out running for president.

Second, and most significant, virtually every self-respecting industry would get out of the state, leaving nobody around to befoul the air, dump chemicals in the water, or spread toxic wastes in the landfills.

Third, because they wouldn't have

jobs, people would leave the state in droves, especially wealthy and middle-class people. They're the ones who use the most energy, create the most waste, buy the cars and boats, run the industries.

With the state's population reduced to, say, a million or so poor people, Teddy's great grandchildren, my brothers under the fur, would again thrive throughout the state.

D.S.: That's a pretty dark and ruthless approach to environmental protection.

S.T.B.: And people have been pretty dark and ruthless to the Louisiana Black Bears. We don't even get royalties for the sale of Teddy bear dolls. If we'd gotten fifty cents per doll over all these years, we could have bought up as much of the bottomland hardwood swamp as we need. But we didn't get a nickel.

I've recruited some grizzly cousins for some terrorism. They'll kidnap campers and then exchange them to the federal government for bear habitat. I have hired Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North as a consultant in this project.

D.S.: (shaking head) What ever happened to the gentle, furry little fellow with the campaign hat?

S.T.B.: Hey, Ace. Not to sound trite, but it's a jungle out there. Δ

Teddy update

by René Maggio

In the time since Smokey was interviewed for the accompanying story, his 70 to 200 (depending on who you talk to) remaining "brothers under the fur" have been listed as a "threatened" species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), not an endangered one.

The designation was announced by USFWS on December 30th and covers all black bears living in western Mississippi, eastern Texas, and Louisiana. A lawsuit brought against USFWS by the Defenders of Wildlife has been dropped as a result of the listing.

The "threatened" designation occurred because the Louisiana black bear has only "questionable" status as a distinct subspecies in the region.

While there are black bears around the Southeast, there just aren't many of the "questionable" Louisiana Black Bears left.

While the "threatened" designation is not nearly as useful for their protection and ultimate survival as endangered would have been, it is clearly a small step in the right direction.

To take the bigger step in the right direction (inclusion on the Endangered

Species list as endangered). Chapter members who care about the survival of these bears should become educated about them — and more importantly — involved in their future.

A great place to start your education and involvement, would be to contact the recently formed Black Bear Conservation Committee (BBCC). "This organization was formed to evaluate the status of the Louisiana Black Bear in its original, historic home range of Louisiana, western Mississippi, and eastern Texas" according to James Dyer of the Committee.

"The BBCC's goal is to conserve and manage the Louisiana black bear in its native habitat," says Dyer. "This is to be accomplished by conducting and supporting research into the current status of the bear and by informing the public about issues pertaining to this fascinating creature."

If the welfare of our own living Teddy bears concerns you, write:

Black Bear
Conservation Committee
P.O. Box 52477
Shreveport, LA 71135

They have just published their first newsletter in December of 1991, and they are also offering posters and window stickers for sale so that you can show your

support for Teddy.

Our outgoing Chapter Chair, Paul Davidson is a member of the BBCC and has recently been hired by the Louisiana Nature Conservancy as its Black Bear Coordinator. Paul may be reached regarding the Black Bear at:

The Nature Conservancy
Louisiana Field Office
P.O. Box 4125
Baton Rouge, LA 70821

or you may call him at (504) 338-1040 or FAX him at (504) 338-0103. The Black Bear issue has recently gotten national attention from the Nature Conservancy. The September/October issue of its bi-monthly magazine ran a comprehensive feature article entitled "The Swamp Bear's Last Stand."

It was written by Bob Anderson, the environmental editor for the Baton Rouge Morning Advocate and is an excellent primer on the bear and the problems facing it, not the least of which is habitat loss. Contact the Conservancy at the above address for reprints of the article.

It would be a pity to allow the Louisiana Black Bear to become extinct, even if it is considered a "questionable" subspecies. Our first (and only) environmental president would be ashamed of us. Who wouldn't be. Δ