

# Bear Viewing...Safely

By Sue Jennings, Writer/Editor, Tongass National Forest

Wilderness Field Manager John Neary, visited Hoonah in May to speak to the Icy Strait Point regular “bear tour” guides, other guides, and Icy Strait Point bear expert Owen James. Icy Strait Point is a cruise ship destination in Hoonah managed by the Hoonah Totem Corporation. During a morning presentation, John discussed with the guides and Forest Service personnel how the process of habituation can affect bear behavior. He answered questions and explain some of the bear behavior observed around Hoonah, for example, why bears move to slide areas in the fall even though fish are still in the streams. (Bears move to the slide areas in the fall to eat berries, including devil’s club berries, because it helps clean the parasites out of their stomachs that they acquired from eating raw fish.

In the afternoon, John and the guides visited Spasski Creek to walk the trail used for bear viewing in order to discuss scenarios that tour groups experience with bears. In most bear



*John Neary indicates bear viewing area at Spasski Creek to bear expert Owen James and other guides.*

viewing areas, there are multiple close calls or concern areas around pinch points near platforms, blind corners, bedding areas or other places bears and people meet. John explained that the level of habituation among the bears would vary with multiple responses possible. Other factors to consider are the bear age, gender, presence of cubs, and the size of the tour group.

John focused on the dynamics of viewing wild bears safely, and on the responsibilities of strictly managing human food and travel when in bear areas. He touched on many other aspects of bear natural history with a particular focus on brown bear ecology and seasonal travel patterns. John’s presentation will help the bear guides and other guides answer questions from the cruise ship visitors this summer and will help them properly respond to some close calls with bears.

The Icy Strait Point crew appreciated his time and learned new things about bears.



*John Neary discusses a bear-marked tree with Icy Strait Point guides.*