



Steve Searles began working with the Town of Mammoth Lakes in 1996 and today, is employed as its Wildlife Specialist, teaching humans and bears to coexist through actions and phrases

that are recognizable whether you walk on two feet or four. Using unique methods to haze the bears and educate the public, Steve is helping Mammoth properly interact with its wildlife.

Searles is a self-taught bear expert who's been working with bears for nearly three decades. He helped formulate Yosemite National Park's initial bear program and also invented the "Scat" kits that are now routinely used for bear aversion/conditioning.

Steve works within the Town of Mammoth Lakes' limits with rubber bullets, firecrackers, flares, air horns and shouts of "Bad bear!" to establish that he is the biggest, baddest bear around. He reminds the public to keep their trash contained and is always blown away by the love the community has for its bears, even when the critters cause major home destruction as they are apt to do if left unwatched.

Before Searles began his work the bears in Mammoth would have been trapped or shot with a tranquilizer gun - or maybe just shot, period.

"It was never suppose to be this way," says Steve. "I was just a hunter who wanted to help out and things just fell into place." Claiming he was always the person least likely to succeed, Steve feels he has made it to this point because he had a message that everyone was hungry for.

"People were tired of killing bears. Even bear hunters don't want to shoot a bear that's in a trash bin," he says. "That's why people like the idea of teaching them to have fear of people and run away; something that is not instinctual to the bears when they are born."

Steve is happily married to his wife Deb. "She's the bomb. She puts up with me and I would be nobody without her." The two have a son named Tyler.

What it boils down to for Searles and those who work with him is two-sided respect. Humans should respect the bears by cleaning up after themselves and bears should respect humans by not trashing their homes and belongings. Sometimes both just need a reminder and that's where Steve comes in.

