

Safety in Bear Country



There are many specific things people can do to avoid attracting bears, either grizzly or black. Good sanitation is a key to many of these. Odors attract bears to potential food items. Carefully controlling odors associated with food and products which humans use prevent bears from being conditioned to being near people. This means that we need to store food, garbage, cooking gear, and cosmetics where bears cannot get them. Once conditioned, a bear is dangerous. It may approach humans closely and come into camps or near homes to search for food.

Some Things You Can Do

- Keep a clean camp.
- Store only sleeping gear and clean clothing in the tent. Never sleep in the clothing worn while cooking.
- Hang all food, garbage, cooking gear, and cosmetics in a tree at least 10 feet above the ground and 4 feet from the tree trunk or nearby branches. If there is a device provided for storing or hanging your food or other items, use it. If you are camped near your vehicle, store these items in the trunk. Use PVC-type float sacks for storing items to minimize odors.
- Never use the stuff sacks for tents or sleeping bags to store food, garbage, cooking gear, or cosmetics. This may transmit smells attractive to bears to tents and sleeping bags.
- Where hunting is permitted, store game meat as you would human food. Dispose of fish entrails by puncturing the air bladder and dropping them in deep water, allowing natural decomposition.
- Dispose of used tampons or sanitary napkins by packing them out in a sealed plastic bag.
- Pitch your tent 100 yards uphill from the area where you're cooking and storing food, if possible.
- Never bury or burn garbage.
- Never cook in or near a tent.
- Avoid cooking strong-smelling foods; use dehydrated foods when possible.
- Use a stove instead of a cooking fire whenever possible.
- Store horse and pet feed the same as human food.
- If dogs are permitted in the area, keep your dog on a leash; a free ranging dog may lead a bear back to you.

Hiking in Bear Country

- Stay informed about recent bear activity in the area.
- Leave a travel plan with a friend, and sign in and out at the trailhead so that someone will know when to expect your return.
- Avoid sudden encounters and destruction of habitat. Stay on trails.
- Hike in groups to avoid surprising bears.

- Hike in daylight hours only.
- Make human sounds by talking, singing, or clapping your hands. Avoid high-pitched voices.
- Stay alert. Be aware of your surroundings. The potential for a bear encounter always exists. Look for paw prints, droppings, fresh diggings, torn-apart logs, and rocks that have been turned over. These may signal that a bear is active in the area.
- It is easy to become absorbed in photography, bird watching, or sightseeing. Stay alert.
- Bear food supplies such as berry fields, fish spawning areas, and animal carcasses should be recognized and avoided.
- Watch for noisy streams and wind directions that may mask your sound and scent.
- All bears have the ability to climb trees, some better than others.
- Just because you don't see a bear doesn't mean they are not around. Grizzly bears hide or make daybeds in thick brush, often near trails.
- Always carry a used bandana, shirt, or parka that you can drop easily. Avoid dropping food; this will only encourage the bear's aggressiveness toward other hikers.

If You Encounter a Bear

If you see a bear, stay calm and give it plenty of room. Do not startle it; detour slowly, keeping upwind so it will get your scent and know you are there. If you can't detour wait until it moves away from your route before proceeding.

When a bear first detects you, it may stand upright and use all of its senses to determine what and where you are. Once it identifies you it may ignore you, move slowly away, run, or it may charge. A wild bear rarely attacks unless it feels threatened or provoked.

On four legs, a bear may show agitation by swaying its head from side to side, making huffing noises and clacking its teeth.

A charge or retreat may follow. Flattened ears and raised hair on the back of the neck indicate aggressive intent. If a bear runs with a stiff, bouncing gait, it may be a false charge.

Never run, and do not try to climb a tree unless you are sure you have time to climb at least 10 feet before the bear reaches you. Bears can run very fast.

If attacked by a bear, do not run. Bears can easily outrun you. Try playing dead. Lie flat on your stomach, or lie on your side with your legs drawn up to your chest. Clasp your hands over the back of your neck. Bears have passed by people in these positions without harming them.