



Know Before You Go

Preparing to Visit a National Forest

Black Bears

Despite the name, the coat of a black bear isn't always black. There are brown black bears, white black bears and even a blue glacier bear. Experts estimate the average weight of a black bear is 300 pounds. Despite their size, black bears are very agile tree climbers. During times of danger or threat, bear cubs will take shelter in trees.



Bears by nature are opportunists. In the wild, they will feed on whatever is readily available. Food odors and improperly stored garbage will attract bears to campgrounds and picnic sites. Bears become habituated to human food if they find it readily available. Although they are naturally afraid of humans, the animals lose this fear as they begin to associate human scents with the reward of food. Black bears can become a threat to humans, property and themselves—a pattern that normally ends with death. Protect yourself and protect the black bears by storing trash and food in safe locations when you visit a national forest.

Safety Checklist

- Avoid camping and hiking alone in the backcountry.
- Make noise to avoid surprising a bear.
- Never approach a bear or other wild animal.
- Do not hike in the dark.
- Carry EPA registered bear pepper spray.
- Keep a clean camp site by properly disposing of food scraps and garbage.
- Do not leave food or garbage inside fire rings, grills or around your site.
- Never leave food or coolers unattended, even in developed picnic areas.
- If bear-proof containers are not available, store food and garbage inside a hard-top vehicle or trailer. Never store food inside of a tent.
- Wipe tabletops clean before vacating a camp or picnic site.
- If a bear is observed nearby, pack up your food and trash immediately and vacate the area ASAP.
- If necessary, attempt to scare the animal away with loud shouts, by banging pans together, or throwing rocks and sticks at it.
- If a bear approaches, move away slowly; do not run. Get into a vehicle or a secure building.
- Never run away from a bear—back away slowly and make lots of noise.
- If you are attacked by a black bear, try to fight back using any object available. Act aggressively and intimidate the bear by yelling and waving your arms. Playing dead is not appropriate.

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