



## Forest Service News Release

Joy VanDrie, Public Affairs Staff Officer

231-878-0998 Cell/ Text

[joy.vandrie@usda.gov](mailto:joy.vandrie@usda.gov)

### **Superior National Forest Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Bear Aware safety order update**

*Duluth, MN – April 30, 2024* – The Superior National Forest (SNF) has issued an update to a forest order for the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness requiring that all food, food containers and scented items be safely stored to help prevent bear-human interactions.

Similar orders in previous years have been issued in response to bear-human interactions, the intent of Forest Order 09-09-24-02 is to prevent those interactions from occurring by mandating Bear Aware behaviors in regions known to have significant risk of interactions. For more information and details, please visit [Forest Order 09-09-24-02](#).

Superior National Forest Wildlife Biologist, Cheron Ferland, points out that “once a bear is ‘rewarded’ with human food or garbage, it is likely to become habituated and continue the behavior, which could ultimately lead to the bear being dispatched.”

The restrictions apply to Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness as designated on the attached map between March 1 and November 30, effective April 19, 2024 through April 19, 2026. To reduce the chances of attracting wildlife, attractants should be suspended at least 12 feet above the surface of the ground and 6 feet horizontally from the trunk of a tree or stored in an Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee certified bear resistant container. Attractants are any items which have a strong odor and may attract bears and other wildlife, such as food, food containers, scented items (such as soap, lip balm, toothpaste) and refuse.

These restrictions apply to all visitors to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, unless they have a written authorization specifically exempting them from this order or they are carrying out their official duties as a member of a rescue or firefighting team. Attractants do not need to be safely stored if they’re in use, such as cooking or preparing food, or kept under close watch.

Click for Forest Order details: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/superior/notices/?cid=FSEPRD1174552>

**Below are supplemental answers to questions we've received in advance of this release.**

**Q. Why was March included in the policy to hang food or use one of the certified food containers?**

A. There is significant variation from year to year in seasonal weather transitions. Since bears have been known to come out of hibernation as early as March, the Superior Wilderness and Wildlife Staff set March 1 as the effective date for the order.

**Q. How did the Forest Service let the public know about the changes (mandatory to hang or have a certified container)?**

A. A number of organizations work with us to administer permits and provide education to permittees annually. We shared this update with them first and followed it with a press release and publication on our website.

**Q. What led to include the entire BWCA vs. specific lakes or areas, as has been done in the past?**

A. We want visitors to be diligent about properly storing food at all the times and throughout the BWCAW. Putting orders in place and taking them off for short durations of time or for site specific areas can be confusing and may suggest that there's no need to be careful with food storage in other parts of the wilderness or when there is no food storage order in place.

Wilderness-wide food storage orders have been implemented in the past. However, this is the first time we have committed to having a wilderness-wide order in place for this length of time (up to two years with the potential to extend) as a preventative measure. The primary goal of the food storage order is to prevent bears and other wildlife from becoming habituated. Properly storing food will help prevent bears from associating humans and campsites as a source of food.

**Q. Would the Forest Service consider adding hanging poles or other infrastructure at campsites for hanging food, as is done in National Parks, etc. (similar to fire grates at campsites, one at every site)?**

A. We cannot install permanent structures within a federally designated wilderness without justification. If it became necessary to prevent damage to the area, that may provide justification, but our first tool is educating our visitors and changing our behaviors to mitigate that risk.

**Q. Will there be a learning curve or adjustment period for this policy as the paddling season begins, or should people be prepared for strict enforcement starting now?**

A. Our goal initially is to highlight the importance of all of us doing our due diligence to keep wildlife from becoming habituated. Except for gross violations or repeated violation, we intend to issue warnings for the first year of the order. Fortunately, many BWCAW visitors are already practicing good food storage techniques. The concept isn't new, we're just approaching it as a season-long prevention effort, rather than reacting to incidents as they occur.

###

Find out more about the Superior National Forest at [www.fs.usda.gov/superior](http://www.fs.usda.gov/superior) and follow us on [Twitter](#) @SuperiorNF, on [Facebook](#) and [Flickr](#) (photo credit: Superior National Forest) #superiornf