

SAFETY IN BLACK BEAR COUNTRY

Bears often live in the same places we camp, hike and build our houses. This poses a safety concern for both humans and bears. If a bear obtains food from a home or campsite — even once — it may become aggressive in future attempts. This almost guarantees the bear will have to be destroyed. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to protect both you and the bear.

CAMP AND HIKE RESPONSIBLY

Sloppy campers and hikers don't just endanger themselves, but also future visitors. Bears have amazing memories; they will return to a site repeatedly if they ate there at some point in the past.

MAINTAIN A BEAR-SAFE CAMPSITE

- Store food, drinks and scented items securely (in your vehicle, a bear-safe container or a tree — never in your tent)
- Wipe down picnic tables
- Burn food off stoves or grills
- Pitch tents away from trails in the backcountry
- Always sleep inside your tent
- Never approach or feed a bear
- Store trash in a secure location or bear-safe container

TAKE PRECAUTIONS WHILE HIKING

- Stay alert at dawn and dusk, when bears are more active
- Go with a group, if possible
- Make noise as you travel through dense cover
- Stay away from animal carcasses
- Store food, trash and scented items (such as sunscreen) in airtight plastic bags
- Keep kids in the center of the group

IF YOU ENCOUNTER A BEAR:

Stand your ground. Never back up, lie down or play dead. Stay calm and give the bear a chance to leave. Prepare to use your bear spray or another deterrent.

Don't run away or climb a tree. Black bears are excellent climbers and can run up to 35 mph — you cannot outclimb or outrun them.

Know bear behavior. If a bear stands up, grunts, moans or makes other sounds, it's not being aggressive. These are the ways a bear gets a better look or smell and expresses its interest.

IF A BEAR ATTACKS:

Use bear spray. Then leave the area. Studies have shown bear spray to be 92 percent successful in deterring bear attacks.

Always fight back. And never give up! People have successfully defended themselves with almost anything: rocks, sticks, backpacks, water bottles and even their hands and feet.