

# How to Avoid Bear Encounters: Respect Bears in Their Home

## Bears and You

- Seeing a bear is a memorable experience. But remember, you are a visitor to their home. The future of bears and the safety of others depend on you!!
- Bears are intelligent and learn very quickly. Take the time to learn about bears and how to avoid confrontations. If a bear gets food or garbage from you, it's more likely to be a nuisance or even aggressive to the next person it meets.

## Plan Your Trip

- Bring the proper equipment to avoid confrontations with bears. Avoid packing smelly or greasy food like bacon and fish.
- Bring 100 feet of rope and storage bags for hanging food and other attractants. Small pulleys and carabineers are helpful.

## Bear Resistant Containers

- Bear resistant storage containers are a good method for storing food and other attractants. They can be purchased at many outdoor shops or in some cases can be rented from outdoor shops. Check with the local Forest Service or Game & Fish Office for availability.
- ***COOLERS, BACKPACKS, WOODEN BOXES AND TENTS ARE NOT BEAR RESISTANT!***
- Do not leave food or other bear attractants in open vehicles at trailheads, campgrounds or along forest roads.

## While in Bear Country

- View and photograph all wildlife from a distance and do not approach a bear even if it looks calm.
- Be careful! Learn to recognize bear sign – tracks, diggings and scat. Avoid camping in these areas.
- Hike in groups rather than alone.
- Bears are most active at night. Hiking after dark or at dawn or dusk may increase your chances of meeting a bear.
- Bears don't like surprises! Use extra caution in places where visibility or hearing is limited such as bushy areas near streams. Talking, singing, or wearing bells will reduce your chances of surprising a bear.

## Properly Store All Food

- The most important part of visiting bear country is keeping **ALL** food and **ATTRACTANTS**, pop, beer, canned goods, toothpaste, lip balm, game meat, garbage, dog food, livestock feed, etc., unavailable to bears!

- Remember, bears learn very quickly. Bears which associate food with people may become aggressive and dangerous – this may lead to personal injury, property damage and dead bears.
- Attractants must be hung 10 feet off the ground and 4 feet out from any vertical support, or in a bear resistant container.

### **Camping in Bear Country**

- Choose a campsite free of fresh bear signs.
- Keep a clean camp!! Food and odors attract bears.
- Store your food, garbage and other bear attractants well away (100 yards) from your sleeping area.
- Cook well away (100 yards) from sleeping area.
- Do not bury or bury garbage. Bears will dig it up!

### **If You Encounter a Bear:**

- First, try to slowly back out of the situation. Keep calm, avoid direct eye contact, back up slowly and speak in a soft monotone voice. Never turn your back to the bear and never kneel down. Most encounters end with the bear leaving the area.
- Stay close together if in a group.
- NEVER RUN, and do not try to climb a tree unless you are sure you can climb to at least 100 feet before the bear reaches you. Remember, you cannot out run a bear!
- If a bear charges, stand your ground. Bears often “bluff charge” or run past you. The bear may charge several times before leaving the area.
- Climbing a tree may not work for black bears as they are agile climbers.
- As a last resort, play dead. Curl into a ball or lie flat, covering your neck and head with your hands and arms. If you have a backpack, leave it on as it will help protect your back. If the bear swats at you, roll with it. Stay face down and do not look at the bear until you are sure it is gone. Many people have survived bear attacks using this method.
- Bear repellent pepper spray has proven very effective in warding off charging bears. It is available at many sporting goods stores.

Excerpted from brochure by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee.