

TRAVELING SAFELY IN BEAR COUNTRY

BEAR BEHAVIOR

Bears are curious, intelligent and potentially dangerous animals, but undue fear of bears can endanger both bears and people. Respecting bears and learning proper behavior in their territory will help so that if you encounter a bear, neither of you will suffer needlessly from the experience. Most bears tend to avoid people. Many bears live in Montana and many people enjoy the outdoors, but surprisingly few people see bears.

BEARS AND PEOPLE

Bears Don't Like Surprises. If you are hiking through bear country, make your presence known — especially where the terrain or vegetation makes it hard to see. Make noise, sing or talk. The human voice is the best way to identify yourself as human. If possible, travel with a group. Detour around areas where you see or smell carcasses of fish or animals, or see scavengers congregated. A bear may be feeding in the area.

Don't crowd bears Give bears plenty of room. Some bears are more tolerant than others, but every bear has a personal “space” — the distance within which a bear feels threatened. **Bears are always looking for something to eat** Bears have only about six months to build up fat reserves for their long winter hibernation. Don't let them learn human food or garbage is an easy meal. **Keep a clean camp** Store all food away from your campsite. We will store all food and garbage in certified bear proof containers and you can store any personal items you'd like to keep out of your tent in the containers as well. When you set up your tent for the evening try to set it up away from the kitchen area. Don't leave food or other attractants unattended.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS; WHAT TO DO

If you see a bear, avoid it if you can. Give the bear every opportunity to avoid you. If you do encounter a bear at close distance, remain calm. Attacks are rare. Chances are, you are not in danger. Most bears are interested only in protecting food, cubs, or their “personal space.” Once the threat is removed, they will move on. Remember the following:

Identify yourself. Let the bear know you are *human*. Talk to the bear in a normal voice. Wave your arms slowly. Help the bear recognize you. If a bear cannot tell what you are, it may come closer or stand on its hind legs to get a better look or smell. A standing bear is usually curious, not threatening. You may try to back away slowly, keeping your head diverted but your eyes on the bear, if the bear follows, *stop* and hold your ground. **Don't run.** You can't outrun a bear. They have been clocked at speeds up to 35 mph, and like dogs, they will chase fleeing animals. Bears often make bluff charges, sometimes to within 10 feet of their adversary, without making contact. Continue waving your arms and talking to the bear calmly. If the bear gets too close, raise your voice and be more aggressive. **If Attacked.** If a bear actually makes contact, you have two choices: play dead or fight back. The best choice depends on whether the bear is reacting defensively or is seeking food. Play dead if you are attacked by a grizzly bear you have surprised, encountered on a carcass, or any female bear that seems to be protecting cubs. Lie flat on your stomach with your hands behind your neck and your legs spread to help stabilize your position. Leave your pack on. Typically, a bear will break off its attack once it feels

the threat has been eliminated. Remain motionless for as long as possible. If you move, and the bear sees or hears you, it may return and renew its attack. Rarely, lone black bears or grizzlies may perceive a person as potential food. Fight any bear that follows you or breaks into a tent or building. Fight any black bear regardless of circumstances.

Protection Firearms should *never* be used as an alternative to common-sense approaches to bear encounters. Bear Sprays have proven to be the most against bears. These sprays have a range of approximately 20ft. If discharged upwind or in a vehicle, they can disable the user. Take appropriate precautions and be aware of your surroundings.

If you carry bear spray, keep it handy and know how to use it. If you come across a bear get your spray out and have it ready to use. Make a quick assessment of wind direction and where others might be located. If the bear charges, your spray is effective within 20ft. Discharge your spray in short, quick bursts. This will allow you to use your spray longer and more effectively. You are trying to create a cloud of spray that the bear will run into, not necessarily spray the bear directly in the face. We can provide bear spray to those who would like to carry it and go over its use. It is also a good idea to practice getting your spray out and armed quickly while you are hiking so you won't have to think about it if you need to use it.

In Summary

- Avoid surprising bears; look for signs of bears and make plenty of noise when traveling in bear country. Avoid crowding bears; respect their “personal space.”
- Avoid attracting bears through improper handling of food or garbage.
- Plan ahead, keep alert, stay calm, identify yourself, don't run. In most cases, bears are not a threat, but they do deserve your respect and attention.

To learn more about hiking and camping in Bear Country please visit the Park Service link below. Also, feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns you may have.

<http://www.nps.gov/yell/naturescience/bearenc.htm>