

TerranearPMC Safety Share

Week of June 29, 2015 – Wilderness Fun and Bear Awareness

This is the time of the year when so many of us get out into the wilderness to enjoy time away from the rat race and get in touch with nature. Whether you hike, mountain bike, ride the rivers, go horseback riding, or just enjoy the peace and serenity that our natural environments provide, there are a number of precautions you should take: one of which is maintaining an awareness of animals.

Negative encounters with animals are generally the result of human carelessness rather than an aggressive act by the animal. This is especially true with bears. Most bear "attacks" are caused by surprising a bear. Usually this can be prevented. Understanding bear behavior and recognizing bear signs are important when hiking or camping in Bear Country.

Bears are naturally afraid of humans, but may become "habituated" or accustomed to people along popular hiking trails. Should a bear come near you it is most likely curious or smells something interesting. If he stands up, he is not going to attack but is trying to get a better look or smell. Bear attacks are extremely rare and by comparison, a person is about 67 times more likely to be killed by a dog or 90,000 times more likely to be killed in a homicide.

Bears are powerful and strong; they should always be treated with caution and respect. While we cannot completely control the actions of wildlife, we do have the ability to practice some things that can reduce encounters. For instance, it is very important to make noise while hiking as this can help reduce surprising an animal. Also, hiking off trail or hiking at night can increase your chance of an animal encounter. .

Bear country can also be home to cougars, snakes and other wildlife, such as bison, moose, deer and elk. And that means being cautious while driving. These animals can dart out in the road without warning. So if you're not careful, a serious accident – either due to a collision with an animal or by quickly swerving to avoid a collision (thereby going off the road) can occur.

When you establish your campsite, don't be careless with food or garbage. Wild animals, especially bears, may wander through at any time of day or night. Wild animals near a campground are more likely to be habituated or food-conditioned (used to people and their food). Having lost their natural fear of humans, these animals often become increasingly aggressive in their attempts to obtain human, pet and livestock food. So protect yourself and others and prevent wild animals from obtaining human food and garbage by keeping a clean camp. Deposit all garbage in wildlife-resistant trash containers.

Keep all food and food-related items inside a closed, hard-sided vehicle or a special bear-resistant container except when preparing or eating food. Ice chests, coolers, boxes, cans, tents and soft-sided campers are not bear-resistant! It is recommended that your eating area should be separate from your sleeping area; about 100 yards apart. Food can also be stored above ground, hanging from a tree at least 12 feet and more than 4 feet from the tree trunk.

Keep pets on a leash while with you or inside a cool, well-ventilated vehicle. Pets may threaten and harass wildlife and can lead predators to your camp. Pets are not allowed on hiking trails in most



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parcs and refuges. Do not leave pets unattended in bear country!

Here are a number of guidelines that may be helpful in the event of an encounter with a bear.

- If a bear approaches you, stay calm.
- ABSOLUTELY DO NOT RUN (running may elicit a chase response in the bear).
- Pick up small children so they don't run, scream or panic.
- Gather the group together and restrain your dog.
- Let the bear know you are human; talk in a soothing voice; lift arms overhead to look bigger.
- Slowly back away and avoid direct eye contact with the bear .
- If the bear lunges, snaps his jaws, slaps ground or brush with paw, he feels threatened -you are too close.
- The bear may also suddenly rush forward and stop as a "bluffing" tactic to intimidate you to leave; momentarily hold your ground, then keep backing away and talking softly.
- Don't crowd the bear; leave him a clear escape route.
- Retreat from the area or make a very wide detour around the bear.
- If he continues to follow you, stand your ground and yell, clap your hands, wave your arms, or throw something toward him - repeat until he leaves.
- As a last resort - drop something like a hat to distract him but avoid tossing him food or your backpack as he will quickly learn to confront other humans for food rewards.

Something else that may be helpful is bear spray, which is advisable to carry with you when walking in a campground at night. Staying alert and having a flashlight is also important. .

Bear Spray plays an important part in reducing attacks. While it has been shown to be an effective deterrent, it can be adversely affected by wind, rain, temperature, and even how close the bear is when it charges. It is important to remember that pepper sprays (personal defense sprays) are not the same as bear spray. Although both types of sprays are made from oleoresin capsicum, it is the capsaicin and related capsaicinoids that are the active ingredients in bear spray. Therefore, if you see claims on a large can that state 10%, 20%, or 30% oleoresin capsicum, it is pepper spray (personal defense spray), not bear spray. Currently the EPA requires that the concentration of Capsaicin and related capsaicinoids range between 1 and 2%. The variance in potency within this range is negligible, and all will affect the eyes, nose, throat and lungs of a bear. The minimum size can the EPA will register currently is 7.9 ounces, or 225 grams.

In 1999, the Center for Wildlife Information conducted a survey among bear management specialists, outfitters, guides, and people who had been involved in bear attacks. Based on information gathered, it is recommended that bear spray should be used at 25 feet. You want the spray to create as wide a barrier between you and the bear as possible so it has the maximum amount of time to affect the bear (eyes, nose, throat, and lungs). The suggested minimum spray duration is 6 seconds. Shorter time periods may be unlikely to provide sufficient protection as bears have been known to initially charge toward you, retreat, and then charge again. Others may circle around you and then charge.

I wish to go on living even after my death

Anne Frank (1929 – 1945)