

TerranearPMC Safety Share

Week of July 11, 2016– Bear Safety

In the classic words of Dorothy, the scarecrow and the tin man, “lions and tigers and bears, OH MY!” You betcha Dorothy! Whether you’re in Kansas or on the way to see the wizard, such animals represent a considerable safety hazard. And while the chances of running into a tiger is rather slim, encounters with mountain lions (which is indigenous to Western US) and bears, especially this time of year, are definite concerns. Summer is the time of the year when many field activities in remote locations, have a significant chance of a bear encounter. These animals are big and strong and *FAST* and can easily cause serious injury to humans.

If you do see a bear, remember *you* are a visitor in their home. How you respond to a happenstance encounter with these creatures, can result in life or death consequences. Like any wild animal, they can be dangerous and are sometimes unpredictable. And while attacks on humans are rare, they can occur. Each bear and each experience is unique; there is no single strategy that will work in all situations that will guarantee your safety. With that said, most bear encounters end without incident or injury.

If you are merely observing a bear in its native habitat, you should be aware that there is a viewing etiquette. Keeping your distance and not surprising bears are paramount. Most bears will avoid humans if they hear them coming. Pay attention to your surroundings while making a special effort to be noticeable in areas with known bear activity or where there is a good food source (such as berry bushes or even humming bird feeders – yes, bears love these!). Here are a few things to keep in mind when you feel you may be encroaching on a bear’s habitat.

- **Respect a bear's space.** Binoculars and spotting scopes allow you to view bears without getting too close.
- **Never approach, crowd, pursue, or displace bears.** If a bear changes its behavior because of your presence, you are too close!
- **Stay in groups and minimize noise and movement.** However, in areas of low visibility or when you're out on the trail, reduce chances of surprise encounters by staying alert and talking calmly to identify yourself as a human, not another animal.
- **Stay on designated trails** whenever possible.
- **Leave "orphaned" or sick bears alone.** Young animals that appear alone usually have a mother waiting nearby. Never get between a mother and her cub.
- **Leave pets at home.**
- **Give bears room to pass.** Do NOT run from a bear.
- **Let bears eat their natural foods.** Prevent bears from getting human food by learning about food storage requirements.
- **You are responsible for your safety and the safety of wildlife.** If a bear approaches you, it is your responsibility to move away and maintain a safe distance.

Once a bear has noticed you and is paying attention to you, additional strategies can help prevent the situation from escalating.

- Talk calmly so the bear knows you are a human and not a prey animal. Remain still; stand your ground but slowly wave your arms. Help the bear recognize you as a human. 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.



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- Most bears do not want to attack you; they usually just want to be left alone. Bears may bluff their way out of an encounter by charging and then turning away at the last second. Bears may also react defensively by woofing, yawning, salivating, growling, snapping their jaws, and laying their ears back. Continue to talk to the bear in low tones; this will help you stay calmer, and it won't be threatening to the bear. A scream or sudden movement may trigger an attack. Never imitate bear sounds or make a high-pitched squeal.
- If you are with small children pick them up immediately!
- Try to hike/travel in groups as teams of people are usually noisier and produce more pronounced scents than a single person. Therefore, bears often become aware of groups of people at greater distances, and because of their cumulative size, groups are also intimidating to bears.
- Make yourselves look as large as possible (for example, move to higher ground).
- Do NOT allow the bear access to your food. Getting your food will only encourage the bear and make the problem worse for others.
- Do NOT drop your pack as it can provide protection for your back and prevent a bear from accessing your food.
- If the bear is stationary, **move away slowly and sideways**; this allows you to keep an eye on the bear and avoid tripping. Moving sideways is also non-threatening to bears. Do NOT run, but if the bear follows, stop and hold your ground. Bears can run as fast as a racehorse both uphill and down. Like dogs, they will chase fleeing animals. Do NOT climb a tree. Both grizzlies and black bears can climb trees.
- Leave the area or take a detour. If this is impossible, wait until the bear moves away. Always leave the bear an escape route.
- Be especially cautious if you see a female with cubs; never place yourself between a mother and her cub, and never attempt to approach them. The chances of an attack escalate greatly if she perceives you as a danger to her cubs.

Experts tell us that every bear encounter is different. Also, attacks from brown bears differ from black bears.

- **Brown/Grizzly Bears:** If you are attacked by a brown/grizzly bear, leave your pack on and **PLAY DEAD**. Lay flat on your stomach with your hands clasped behind your neck. Spread your legs to make it harder for the bear to turn you over. Remain still until the bear leaves the area. Fighting back usually increases the intensity of such attacks. However, if the attack persists, fight back vigorously. Use whatever you have at hand to hit the bear in the face.
- **Black Bears:** If you are attacked by a black bear, **DO NOT PLAY DEAD**. Try to escape to a secure place such as a car or building. If escape is not possible, try to fight back using any object available. Concentrate your kicks and blows on the bear's face and muzzle.

If any bear attacks you in your tent, or stalks you and then attacks, do NOT play dead—fight back! This kind of attack is very rare, but can be serious because it often means the bear is looking for food and sees you as prey.

Bear pepper spray can be an important thing to carry when exploring the back country. It is used defensively to stop an aggressive, charging, or attacking bear. Although it's used in the same manner you would use mace on an attacking person, bear pepper spray and human pepper spray are not the same. It is not a repellent so do not apply to your body or equipment.

I wish I could show you, when you are lonely or in darkness, the astonishing light of your own being - Hafiz of Persia

