

# Staying Safe in Bear Country

## ***MIND OF BEARS:***

Bears are intelligent, curious, individuals, more predictable than most people think.

## ***PHYSICAL TRAITS***

Amazing noses and ears and eyes are good, strong and fast, good swimmers, black bears are great at tree climbing, black bears rarely attack defensively.

## ***BEARS' MOTIVATIONS***

Bears have varying motivations for what they do.

- Food and the search for it dominate a bear's life

- Mating and raising offspring

- Investigating novel stimuli; curiosity

- Establishing and asserting dominance

Most bears have previous experience around people and learn from each interaction.

Humans usually don't even know they came close to a bear, BEARS USUALLY AVOID PEOPLE.

Two major categories of bear-human interactions where bears don't avoid or even approach people: Defensive and Non-defensive.

## ***DEFENSIVE INTERACTIONS***

Bear thinks you are a threat to itself, its cubs or its food.

Usually you approached it and entered into its personal space, surprising or crowding it.

Most likely will appear agitated and stressed.

Closer you are too it before it becomes aware of you, more likely it is to react defensively.

Almost always stop short of contact, fight/flight is triggered.

The few defensive attacks by black bears have been females protecting cubs (but these are very rare).

## ***NON-DEFENSIVE INTERACTIONS***

A number of different non-defensive motivations that may appear similar to each other:

Curious bear, human-habituated bear, food-conditioned bear, dominance-testing bear, predatory bear

The bear may utter a series of huffs, nap (pop) its jaws and swat the ground. These are all warning signs that you are too close. Slowly back away.

Black bears will sometimes "bluff charge" when cornered, threatened or attempting to obtain food. Stand your ground and slowly back away.

## ***PREVENTING BEAR PROBLEMS***

Most of bear safety is prevention.

### ***IF YOU ENCOUNTER A BEAR AT CLOSE RANGE:***

- Remain standing upright
- Avoid direct eye contact
- Back up slowly and speak in a calm, assertive voice
- Do NOT run.

### ***AVOID BEARS WHENEVER POSSIBLE***

- Let the bear you cannot avoid know you are human by talking and slowly waving your arms. Try to give the bear your scent

- Don't surprise bears – warn them of your presence. Make lots of noise. This is especially important when you are on a trail with restricted visibility, as well as those times when the wind is blowing towards you, meaning that bears will not have the benefit of your scent. What is most important is for the bear to hear your approach long before you are within its personal space.

- Increase your distance from the bears even if it appears unaware of you and seems unconcerned. Make sure the bear has an escape route.

- Never approach a bear

- Leave the area where you encountered a bear, report to Ranger

- If you hear vocalizations or see unattended cubs, be extremely cautious and leave the area silently the same way you arrived. Do not run, it could invite pursuit.

### ***DON'T ATTRACT BEARS OR REWARD THEM WITH FOOD***

Keep a clean camp free of attractants.

Do not leave food out at any time. This is not just a rule for at night – but for all day too! Soaps, lotions, and toothpaste can also attract bears and should be kept in air-tight containers and put away when not in use