

Living with Wildlife in Bear Country

Who to Contact about Bear Conflicts

If you have a potentially life-threatening situation with a black bear, or if an injury occurs, *please contact the Division of Wildlife, Monday through Friday, 8AM – 5PM, as listed below. After hours, contact the [Colorado State Patrol](#) or your local Sheriff's Department.*

To report property damage, please contact the Division during normal business hours. Your report is very important to us.

DOW Headquarters (Denver): 303/297-1192
Northeast Service Center (Denver): 303/291-7227
Fort Collins Service Center: 970/472-4300
Southeast Service Center (Colo. Springs): 719/227-5200
Northwest Service Center (Grand Junction): 970/255-6100
Southwest Service Center (Durango): 970/247-0855
Montrose Service Center: 970/252-6000
Gunnison Service Center: 970/641-7060

What if You Encounter a Black Bear?

There are no definite rules about what to do if you meet a bear. In almost all cases, the bear will detect you first and will leave the area. Bear attacks are rare compared to the number of close encounters. However, if you do meet a bear before it has had time to leave the area, here are some suggestions.

Remember: Every situation is different with respect to the bear, the terrain, the people, and their activity.

Stay calm. If you see a bear and it hasn't seen you, calmly leave the area. As you move away, talk aloud to let the bear discover your presence.

Stop. Back away slowly while facing the bear. Avoid direct eye contact as bears may perceive this as a threat. Give the bear plenty of room to escape. Wild bears rarely attack people unless they feel threatened or provoked.

If on a trail, step off the trail on the downhill side and slowly leave the area. Don't run or make any sudden movements. Running is likely to prompt the bear to give chase and you can't outrun a bear. Do not attempt climbing trees to escape black bears. This may stimulate the bear to follow and pull you out by the foot. Stand your ground.

Speak softly. This may reassure the bear that no harm is meant to it. Try not to show fear.

In contrast to grizzly bears, female black bears do not normally defend their cubs aggressively; but send them up trees. However, **use extra caution if you encounter a female black bear with cubs.** Move away from the cub; be on the lookout for other cubs.

Bears use all their senses to try to identify what you are. *Remember:* Their eyesight is good and their sense of smell is acute. If a bear stands upright or moves closer, it may be trying to detect smells in the air. This isn't a sign of aggression. Once it identifies you, it may leave the area or try to intimidate you by charging to within a few feet before it withdraws.

Fight back if a black bear attacks you. Black bears have been driven away when people have fought back with rocks, sticks, binoculars and even their bare hands.

Living in Bear Country

If you choose to live, or have a summer home, in bear country, make sure you don't contribute to resident bears becoming 'garbage' bears. Most conflicts between bears and people are linked to careless handling of food or garbage. Don't let your carelessness cause the unnecessary death of a bear. Learn to live responsibly with wildlife!



Black bears eat almost anything. They will eat human food, garbage, hummingbird food, and pet and livestock food when available. Once a bear has found the easily accessible, consistent food source that human settlements can offer, it may overcome its wariness of people and visit regularly, increasing the chance of a human/bear encounter. You and your neighbors can make a difference. Your actions may prevent the unnecessary death of a bear!

Make your property safe by keeping garbage out of reach and smell of bears. Use bear-proof trash containers. Be sure garbage cans are emptied regularly. Periodically clean garbage cans to reduce residual odor—using hot

water and chlorine bleach, or by burning trash residue in cans. Store trash in a bear proof enclosure. [Contact the Division of Wildlife](#) for designs.

If you have pets, do not store their food or feed them outside. Clean your BBQ grill of grease and store inside. Hang bird seed, suet and hummingbird feeders on a wire between trees instead of on your deck or porch. Bring all bird feeders in at night. Do not put fruit, melon rinds and other tasty items in mulch or compost piles.

[See some bear proof containers.](#) (The Division of Wildlife offers this link for informational purposes only. The Division does not endorse any of the products or vendors mentioned within.)

As you might guess, beehives attract bears. *You can protect your bees, honey, and equipment if you surround the hives with fences designed to keep bears out.* [Contact the Division of Wildlife](#) for designs.

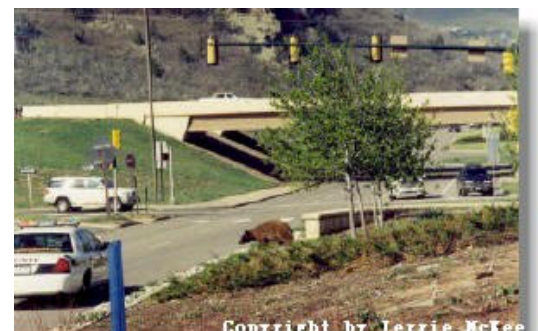
Most bears sighted in residential areas within bear habitat do not cause any damage. If a bear doesn't find abundant food, it will move on.

Camping or Hiking in Bear Country

Although black bears are generally shy and avoid human contacts, there are some precautions you can take to avoid encounters if you camp and hike in bear country. You are responsible for doing all you can to prevent conflicts with bears. If a bear gets food from you, it's likely to behave more aggressively toward the next people it meets. Don't reward a bear for associating with people.

Camping:

Keep your camp clean. Store food and garbage properly at all times. Keep your tent and sleeping bag free of all food smells. Store the clothes you wore while cooking or eating with your food. Burn all grease off grills and camp stoves. Wipe table and clean up eating area thoroughly.



Store your food safely. Store all your food and coolers in your car trunk or suspended from a tree—at least ten feet off the ground and four feet out from the tree trunk. Don't underestimate the ingenuity of a bear! *Vehicles are not bear proof.*

Dispose of garbage properly. Put it in bear-proof garbage cans where available or secure it with your food and then pack it out. Don't burn or bury garbage. Bears will dig it up.

Sleep well away from food areas. Move some distance away from your cooking area or food storage site.

Store any toiletries safely. Store them with your food—the smell of toiletries may attract bears. Abstain from sexual activity. Practice good personal hygiene.

Hiking:

Enjoy the woods! Hiking at dawn or dusk may increase your chances of meeting a bear. Use extra caution in places where hearing or visibility is limited: in brushy areas, near streams, where trails round a bend or on windy days. Avoid berry patches in fall. Reduce your chances of surprising a bear by making noise—talk or sing.

Make sure children are close to you or at least within your sight at all times. Leave your dog at home or have it on a leash.

Other Sources of Information

Do you live in the Durango area? Area residents, concerned about bear and human conflicts in the region, came together in 2003 and formed [Bear Smart Durango](#). The organization believes that bear and human conflict in Durango has as much to do with the behavior of people as it does with bears, and that people and bears can safely coexist. They feel that coexisting with wildlife is their responsibility and created a Web site to educate others about avoiding conflicts with wildlife.

Do You Live in Boulder? The City of Boulder provides a WEB page for its citizens with information on bears in Boulder County. You can find it by going to the [City of Boulder—Mountain Lions and Black Bears page](#).

[The Get Bear Smart Society](#) champions management policies that reduce both the number of human-bear conflicts and the number of bears destroyed. Their mission is to provide a safe environment in which people and bears can coexist in harmony.