

Bear/Human Conflicts

Use Common Sense in Bear Country

Nevada's black bear population is estimated at 200-300 animals. As human presence increases in black bear habitat, confrontations become more frequent. When bears become accustomed to people, bolder behavior results. These bears are referred to as human-habituated, and may become food conditioned bears. At this stage, bears may enter residences seeking human food. Bears frequenting urban areas are often hit by cars. When people feed bears, either intentionally or accidentally, the ultimate result is the death of the bear. Bear sightings in residential areas may be a result of several possible situations:

Things such as garbage, bird feeders, fruit trees, fish ponds, pet food, camp food, compost piles, barbecue grills or bee hives may attract bears. **These are by far the most common reasons for bear/human conflicts.** Drought conditions or other climatic occurrences may limit the quantity and quality of natural food sources.

As juvenile bears are dispersed by the mother bear, they cover large distances in search of their own range, and may frequent urban areas looking for food.

Living in bear country requires that residents take extra precautions and be **BEAR AWARE**. **The Nevada Department of Wildlife recognizes that bears rummaging through garbage cans or foraging on fruit trees constitute a nuisance, and may frighten residents, but ... it is the residents' responsibility to remove or make the attractants inaccessible before further steps are taken by the Department of Wildlife.** In most cases this will help keep the bears from returning. However, once a bear becomes

conditioned to human food, it becomes very difficult to keep them away. Relocation, which usually fails, is not an option. "Bear Education" using traps and aversion conditioning will sometimes work **if** the original attractant has been removed. This technique uses non-lethal rubber bullets, pepper spray, and specially trained dogs to "educate the bear" before releasing it in the area it was captured. **Persistent or extremely bold bears may have to be euthanized.**

Although black bears rarely attack, they are very powerful animals and are capable of injuring or killing humans.

If You Encounter a Bear

Never attempt to feed or approach a bear! Give it plenty of room to pass by and it usually will. No fatal bear attacks have been reported in Nevada, however, predatory black bear attacks seem to be increasing within their North American range.

If a bear approaches you - **don't run!** Remain facing the bear, and make yourself look bigger by raising your arms and talking firmly. You should back away, keeping the bear in sight. Make noise and show the bear it is unwelcome. If you have young children in the area, pick them up or put them on your shoulders. Remember, you can't outrun a black bear! They are extremely fast running uphill, downhill or any other direction they decide to go.

Warning signs of an impending charge include: a steady glare; ears laid back; smacking of the jaws and stomping of the front feet. If the bear attacks, fight back with

anything available. Throwing rocks or hitting a bear with large sticks has been effective in some cases. **Carry bear pepper spray and know how to use it.**

Living in Bear Habitat

Use bear-resistant garbage containers available through commercial dealers. Wait until the morning of pick-up before placing garbage out. Dumpsters with lockable metal lids work well, as do fencing enclosures made of chain link fencing or 2 x 4 framing.

Spray or pour ammonia in and around garbage cans, and avoid placing aromatic food wastes, such as bacon grease or spoiled foods, in garbage cans.

Feed pets indoors.

Use electrical fencing combined with a tall, metal or wooden fence to protect orchards, fish ponds, beehives, compost piles, and livestock. Constant harassment with scare devices, loud noises or dogs will sometimes work.

The feeding of any wildlife, including birds, may inadvertently attract bears.

Recreating in Bear Habitat

While hiking in bear habitat, make plenty of noise to avoid a surprise encounter. **Carry bear pepper spray and know how to use it.**

Keep a close watch on children while they are outdoors, and teach them what to do if they encounter a bear (see above).

When camping, be sure to use bear-proof food containers, cook away from camp, and never store food in your tent.

Keep a Clean Camp!

Habitat Requirements

Black bears prefer forested habitats mixed with riparian zones and open meadows. Within these areas, thick brush and berry patches are favorite hangouts. Bears will often travel several miles to reach a food source.

Bear Tracks



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Broad footprints with five toes on all feet. Front paws are nearly as wide as they are long. Hind paws resemble a human footprint. The claw marks are usually visible.

Nevada Black Bears

The Bear Facts

The American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*) is the only bear species occurring naturally in Nevada. Studies show that black bears are extremely mobile, with home ranges extending over 50 square miles, which is one reason that relocation of bears is seldom successful.

Black bears come in a variety of colors, ranging from blonde to black, with brown or cinnamon being the most common in Nevada. Adult males average 300 pounds with a few extra large individuals, weighing 500 pounds or more. Adult females average 150 pounds. A bear's weight depends on many factors including sex, genetics, season of year, quality and quantity of food, and overall health. Adults will measure 24-30 inches high at the shoulder.

A bear's sense of smell is thought to be one of the finest in the animal kingdom. They rely on it for everything, including finding a mate, protection, and finding food.

A black bear's eyesight is considered fair to good. They will often stand on their hind legs or approach an object to get a better view, or catch a scent. This is not necessarily an indication of aggression.

Sows (female bears) become sexually mature at three to five years of age. An average of two cubs is produced at a time, born during hibernation in early February. Cubs will stay with the mother through hibernation of their second year. For this reason, adult female bears will normally breed only every other year.

Bears typically are active from March to December in northern Nevada. Activity levels are highest in late summer. Black bears are omnivorous, meaning they will eat both plant and animal matter. In their natural habitat, forage consists of grasses, forbes, berries, insects, nuts (pinenuts in Nevada), small mammals and carrion (dead animals). They are opportunistic feeders and will eat anything that is available. This includes human garbage, and occasionally, livestock. Although rare, predatory black bear attacks on humans have been documented.



"A pine needle fell in the forest...the eagle saw it fall, the deer heard it, and the bear smelled it!"

Remember, even if you remove all attractants, if you live in black bear habitat you will have encounters with bears. Our goal is to help you minimize these conflicts.

Bear Pepper Spray

Capsaicin, the chemical that makes hot peppers hot, is an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved active ingredient in pepper sprays. Be sure it is the main ingredient in your pepper spray. Below are registrants with the EPA that contain capsaicin:

Counter Assault Bear Deterrent- 800-695-3394
UDAP Pepper Power- (800) 232-7941
Bear Peppermace- (802) 447-1503

Bear Resistant

Garbage Containers

Purchase bear resistant containers. Check with home improvement stores, or these other sources:

Tahoe Bear Box Co. - (530) 546-3154
Bearguard - (530) 587-4844
Brown Bear - (530) 587-2895
GP Fabrication - (209) 464-4614

Books

Living with bears, by Linda Masterson,
www.pixyjackpress.com.

The Nevada Department of Wildlife does not endorse any specific products and lists these suppliers for informational purposes only. Check on the Internet and yellow pages for other suppliers.

Living in Bear Country?



Live With the Responsibility

“I’M BEAR AWARE”

Are You?

For more information, contact:
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Living With Bears in Nevada