

## BEAR RIVER MERCANTILE - BOWRON LAKE BC

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### Info Sheet #5 – Bear Sense



Both black and grizzly bears can be found in Bowron Lake Provincial Park, throughout the whole of the Park during the spring, summer and fall months. Most are simply traveling through and usually make every effort to avoid humans, but a bag of garbage or unattended food may be irresistible to their keen sense of smell. Bears that scavenge for food begin to associate food with humans, and become "food-conditioned".

Food-conditioned bears lose their natural fear of humans and can become a threat, as they may decide to roam around in search of an easy meal instead of foraging. Bears are not tame, gentle or cuddly; they are wild animals, unpredictable and potentially dangerous.

There is little or no chance of correcting a food-conditioned bear and Park Rangers may be forced to destroy them if they become aggressive towards humans. Don't be a contributor to food conditioning and remember...**A FED BEAR IS A DEAD BEAR!**

There are some simple precautions that can be taken to prevent the food conditioning of bears and avoid dangerous bear encounters.

- **Never feed or approach bears or other wildlife.** I would like to think that no one would intentionally feed a bear (though experience has shown me different), but what of the unintentional feedings? **Think** before you leave your campsite. Is all the food and "smelly" stuff away and secure? Did anyone throw food remains into the fire pit and not clean it out? (They don't always burn thoroughly) Did you sneak a *forgotten* chocolate bar into the camera bag for a snack later on? (*"Just throw the camera bag in the tent, Dear."*)
- **Reduce or eliminate odors that attract bears.** Avoid strong smelling foods and perfumed toiletries. Look for unscented soaps and deodorant. Even the odors of cosmetics, toothpaste and insect repellent can attract bears. These should be stored out of reach with your food and garbage, never in your tent. Leave strongly perfumed items at home.
- **Food Storage** - In the front country campground, store food in air-tight containers **in your RV or car trunk**. Since this is not an option while out on the Canoe Circuit, BC Parks provides metal



bear-proof caches at all of the backcountry campsites and portage trailheads. **Bear-proof caches must be used** at all times when you are not actively paddling to a new site or cooking. When you are cooking, only have out the one meal you are preparing and keep the rest of in the cache. That way, if you do attract a bear, you might lose one meal, instead of all. Caches must be shared with fellow campers so leave room for other visitors' food.

- **Pack out all your garbage.** Store it with your food out of reach of bears. Do not bury garbage or throw it into pit toilets. Only paper and wood may be burned: food packages, tinfoil, and food waste can be reduced in the fire pit but do not always burn completely. Any remains will attract bears (besides creating an unsightly mess), so make sure to clean the fire pit and pack any remnants out with your garbage. It is also a good idea to burn out any food tins to remove food residue, then flatten them and pack them out.
- **Avoid fish smells** -- they are a strong attractant for bears. Don't clean fish in your campsite. Throw entrails into deep or fast-flowing water, and double-bag fishy-smelling garbage.
- **Cook and eat well away from your tent.**
  1. **Clean up** immediately and thoroughly. Never leave cooking utensils, coolers, grease or dish water lying around. Dispose of dish water by straining it then throw it into a gray water pit or pit toilet. Solids should be thoroughly burned or packed out with the garbage.
  2. **Avoid raw meat** or strong smelling foods. If you bring meat, cook and freeze it before hand, or dehydrate it. If you prefer raw meats, then double bag them in zip lock bags to hold the smell.
  3. **Try to keep cooking odors off** your clothes, and never sleep in your day clothes or store them in your tent with you at night, as they can have cooking odors or food spills on them. Always have a separate set of sleep ware which is used for sleeping only.
- **Always sleep in a tent** -- not under the stars.
- **Hike the portages and trails as a group.** -- You reduce the risk of an attack by traveling together as a group. Do not let children wander.
- **Leave pets at home** -- Free-running pets can anger a bear and provoke an attack, so they are not allowed on the Canoe Circuit. Keep pets leashed in the main campground.
- **Reduce the chance of surprising a bear**
  1. Always check ahead for bears in the distance. If one is spotted, make a wide detour or leave the area immediately.
  2. Do not approach bears on shore, paddle by at a safe distance.

3. When travelling against the wind or near loud moving water, use extreme caution. Make loud warning sounds.
4. Watch for bear sign: tracks, droppings, overturned rocks, rotten trees torn apart, clawed, bitten or rubbed trees, bear trails, fresh diggings or trampled vegetation.

■ **Stay clear of dead wildlife** -- Take note of signs that may indicate carrion -- such as circling crows or ravens, or the smell of rotting meat. Carcasses attract bears. Leave the area immediately! Report the location of dead wildlife to Park staff.

■ **Camp in designated areas only** -- Bear caches are provided at all designated sites.

■ **In general:**

1. If you have an encounter with a bear, please leave the area immediately and report it to Park staff as soon as possible.
2. Obey all Park regulations, stay on designated trails and comply with posted warnings
3. **Bear pepper sprays** have been effective in deterring some bear attacks. However, do not use them as a substitute for safe practices in bear country. Know how to use them. Avoidance is still your best bet.
4. Other wildlife may pose a threat to Park users. **Moose** can become very agitated and aggressive when approached too closely, particularly cows with calves. Please use binoculars and telephoto lenses for wildlife viewing.

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## SOME BEAR FACTS

- Bears are as fast as a racehorse, on the flats, uphill or downhill
- Bears are strong swimmers.
- Bears have good eyesight, good hearing, and an acute sense of smell.
- All black bears and young grizzlies are agile tree climbers; mature grizzlies are poor climbers, but they can reach up to 4 meters.
- If a bear is standing up it is usually trying to identify you. Talk softly so it knows what you are. Move away, keeping it in view. Do not make direct eye contact.
- Bears are strong. They can tear cars apart looking for food.
- Every bear defends a "personal space". The extent of this space will vary with each bear and each situation; it may be a few meters or a few hundred meters. Intrusion into this space is considered a threat and may provoke an attack.
- Bears aggressively defend their food.
- All female bears defend their cubs. If a female with cubs is surprised at close range or is separated from her cubs, she may attack. An aggressive response is the mother grizzly's natural defense against danger to her young.
- A female black bear's natural defense is to chase her cubs up a tree and defend them from the base. However, she is still dangerous and may become aggressive if provoked.

**The most dangerous bears are:**

- Bears habituated to human food.
- Females defending cubs.
- Bears defending a fresh kill.

## Bear safety essentials:

- Respect all bears - they all can be dangerous.
  - Never approach a bear.
  - Never attempt to feed a bear.
  - Be defensive - never surprise a bear.
  - Learn about bears. Anticipate and avoid encounters.
  - Know what to do if you encounter a bear.
  - Each bear encounter is unique. No hard and fast rules can be applied when dealing with a potentially complex situation.
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## BEAR IDENTIFICATION

Identifying bears can be important if you are ever approached by one.

**Black Bear** (*Ursus americanus Pallas*) **Colour:** Varies. Black, brown, cinnamon or blond, often with a white patch on the chest or at the throat.



**Height:** Approximately 90 cm at the shoulder.

**Weight:** 57 kg to >270 kg. Females are usually smaller than males.

**Characteristics:** straight face profile; short, curved claws; barely noticeable shoulder hump

**Habitat:** Prefers forested areas with low-growing plants and berry-producing shrubs (e.g. small forest openings, stream or lake edges and open forest).

**Grizzly Bear** (*Ursus arctos horribilis Ord*) **Colour:** Varies. Black (rare), brown or blond. Fur often white-tipped or "grizzled". Light-colored patches may occur around neck, shoulders and on rear flanks.



**Height:** Slightly above 1 meter at shoulder; 1.8 to 2 m erect.

**Weight:** 200 kg to >450 kg. Females are usually smaller than males.

**Characteristics:** dished or concave face; long, curved claws; prominent shoulder hump

**Habitat:** Semi-open spaces preferred. High country in late summer and early fall; valley bottoms late fall and spring.

## IF YOU SEE A BEAR

### ■ And it does not approach you;

1. If spotted in the distance, do not approach the bear. Make a wide detour or leave the area immediately. Report your sighting to Park Staff at the first opportunity.
2. If you are at close range, **do not approach the bear**. Remain calm, keep it in view. Avoid direct eye contact. Move away without running. Report the sighting to Park Staff.

### ■ And it does approach you

1. If the bear is standing up, it is usually trying to identify you. Talk softly so it knows what you are. If it is snapping its jaws, lowering its head, flattening its ears, growling or making 'woofing' signs, it is displaying aggression.
2. Do not run unless you are very close to a secure place. Move away, keeping it in view. Avoid direct eye contact. Dropping your pack or an object may distract it to give you more time. If it is a grizzly, consider climbing a tree.

### ■ And if the bear attacks

Your response depends on the species and whether the bear is being defensive or offensive. Bears sometimes bluff their way out of a confrontation by charging then turning away at the last moment. Generally, you should do nothing to threaten or further arouse the bear. While fighting back usually increases the intensity of an attack, it may cause the bear to leave. Each incident is unique and the following are only offered as guidelines. Dealing with an unpredictable animal and complex situation is always an unknown situation:

**Grizzly Attacks From Surprise** (defensive)- Do nothing to threaten or further arouse the bear. Play dead. Assume the 'cannonball position' with hands clasped behind neck and face buried in knees. Do not move until the bear leaves the area. Such attacks seldom last beyond a few minutes.

**Black Bear Attacks From Surprise** (defensive)- Playing dead is not appropriate. Make yourself look big, wave hands and try to scare him off. Try to retreat from the attack.

**Grizzly or Black Bear Attacks Offensively** (includes stalking or approaching when you are sleeping) - Do not play dead. Try to escape to a secure place (car or building) or climb a tree unless it is a black bear. If you have no other option, try to intimidate the bear with deterrents or weapons such as tree branches or rocks.

**Grizzly or Black Bear Attacking for Your Food** - Abandon the food. Leave the area. Do not deal with a problem bear unless it is an emergency.

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