



# Living in Bear Country

The American black bear is one of the largest and most impressive animals found in Saskatchewan. Despite their cartoon depictions, bears are potentially dangerous and should be treated with respect. When in bear country, it is in your best interest to minimize any potential conflicts that can arise when bears and humans share the same territory.

Black bears can live in various habitats, but prefer the dense woods of the boreal forest. They require a large amount of food, especially in the autumn when they are building up their fat reserves to survive hibernation. As a result, their preferred habitat contains thick underbrush of berry and nut-bearing plants. They are often found along valleys and other waterways where these plants are plentiful.

Black bears are also scavengers, which means they will investigate anything that looks like a potential meal. For black bears, garbage dumps and garbage cans are a buffet. Black bears can be found feeding in garbage dumps and other areas where they can find garbage and food scraps left by humans. This

sometimes causes problems, as they are a powerful predator that can be dangerous to humans.

## If you encounter a bear

- Never feed or approach a bear or cubs.
- Make a wide detour if you see a bear at a distance. Don't get too close to a bear for the sake of a photograph.
- If you suddenly encounter a bear, calmly back away, speak in low tones and do not look directly at the bear.
- Stay calm – DO NOT RUN. You cannot outrun a bear.
- As a last resort when a bear is very close, dropping an article may distract a bear. Do not drop your pack.
- Move towards a tree or a rock, which may protect you from the bear. Climbing a tree is not an escape but the bear may feel less threatened. Black bears can easily climb trees.
- In almost all cases, a black bear will threaten but will not attack. If an attack does occur

and no escape is possible you should defend yourself. DO NOT PLAY DEAD.

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Black bears are opportunistic, habitual creatures that are naturally drawn to a source of food by their keen sense of smell. If successful in finding an easy source of food, they will continue to return. This is why it becomes critical to “bear-proof” our homes and yards.

If you live in bear country, here are a few guidelines to follow:

- Avoid leaving pet food accessible to wildlife.
- Properly clean barbecue grills after each use.
- Carry bear spray when hiking.
- Keep trash in a secure location, or haul your garbage directly to a landfill.
- A quick blast from an air horn is an effective tool to convince a bear it doesn't belong in your yard. Air horns are inexpensive, readily available and simple to use.

A returning bear likely indicates there is a food source nearby, so have a look around the yard to ensure items that may attract it are picked up and safely stored.

When bears start to associate their food with humans, they become a nuisance.

### **Bears and camping**

Bears have been known to wander through campgrounds on occasion. Proper food storage, cooking methods and garbage handling are essential for safe camping in bear country.

#### **In a campground**

- Never cook or eat in your tent.
- Store food in air-tight containers in the trunk of your vehicle, not in tents or tent-trailers.
- Place all garbage in the containers provided. Do not burn or bury scraps.
- Clean fish only at designated fish-cleaning stations.
- Keep your pet on a leash or inside your vehicle. An unleashed dog may aggravate a bear.
- Use a flashlight at night; do not move about the campsite at night unless necessary.

#### **If a bear enters the campground**

- Stay calm; do not run.
- Do not harass or chase the bear. If the bear is at a distance, calmly place all food in your vehicle.
- Get into your vehicle and report the incident to staff.

#### **In the backcountry**

- Cook at least 100 metres downwind from your tent.
- Store your food in air-tight containers, preferably suspended from a tree (at least four metres up and one metre away from the tree trunk and 400 metres from your campsite).
- Pitch your tent in the open, away from dense bush, streams and game trails.
- Leave your pack outside with flaps open.
- Stay on trails and make noise as you walk, by whistling or singing to warn bears of your presence.
- Look for any signs of bear activity such as tracks, droppings and digging, that indicate bears may be in the area.
- Be especially cautious if your visibility or hearing is obstructed by dense bush or running streams.
- Always supervise small children in any area bears inhabit.
- Avoid areas of bear food sources such as berry patches and carcass remains.
- Dispose of dishwater away from your campsite and do not bury any fish remains.

#### **Remember ...**

- Please report aggressive bear encounters to park staff or a conservation officer promptly.
- The surest protection against injury or damage to your property is prevention.
- Never feed bears or leave food for a bear – you will invite trouble for yourself, as well as for the next campers. Bears that have been fed lose their natural fear for humans. When bears start to associate their food with humans, they become a nuisance. Bears usually have to be destroyed when this occurs. Don't let yourself be the cause of a bear's destruction.
- It is unlawful to feed bears on park land.

If you have an aggressive encounter with a bear, and/or if public safety is at risk, call the Turn in Poachers and Polluters (TIPP) line at 1-800-667-7561 or from your SaskTel cell phone at #5555.

To report concerns about nuisance bear(s), contact the ministry's general inquiry line at 1-800-567-4224 or by email at [centre.inquiry@gov.sk.ca](mailto:centre.inquiry@gov.sk.ca).

Additional information about bears and bear safety is available at [saskatchewan.ca/wildlife-issues](http://saskatchewan.ca/wildlife-issues).