


[Online Services](#)
[Agency List](#)
[Business](#)

Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

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[Hunting](#)
[Fishing](#)
[Licenses](#)
[News,](#)
[Rules](#)
[Enforcement](#)
[Get](#)
[Conservation](#)
[Species](#)
[Publications](#)
[Board / RAC](#)
[About DWR](#)



Bear bites Boy Scout in Hobble Creek Canyon camp

SPRINGVILLE (July 20, 2006) — Fourteen-year-old Colton Stewart was rudely awakened early Wednesday morning by a burning sensation in his upper arm. He suddenly realized that the sharp burning was actually a black bear slowly biting down on his arm through the tent. Once he realized a bear was biting him, he pulled away and heard the black bear running through the brush and into the dark of night.

"Bears often put things in their mouth to see if they are edible. In this case there just happened to be a kid's arm on the other side of the tent," said Anis Aoude, regional wildlife manager for the Division of Wildlife Resources.

"The bear was not aggressively going after anyone; it was simply looking for food," Aoude said.

Stewart is part of the staff at the Adventure Park Scout Camp run by the Boy Scouts of America in the Left Fork of Hobble Creek Canyon near Springville. The bite was not too severe and did not require any medical attention.

Stewart knew it was a bear that bit him because the bear was seen in the camp earlier in the evening and was run out of camp by Colton's father. "After we saw the bear on Tuesday night, I asked my brother and his friend if I could sleep in the middle of the tent because I was afraid the bear would come back and bite me in the middle of the night," Stewart said. "They told me to not worry about it and made me sleep on the edge of the tent. Now they feel stupid."

The following morning signs of the bear were found throughout the camp. Several paw prints, bite marks in tents and even claw marks on tents and on a camp bulletin board let scout officials know that the bear posed a serious threat.

Once DWR staff got word of the incident, they immediately sent a biologist to set up a live bear trap baited with donuts and other food. DWR Conservation Officer Vic Layton was also sent to spend the night with the scouts to ensure they would camp in safety, since bears often return to campgrounds when they find food.

About 15 minutes after Layton arrived at the scout camp on Wednesday evening, the bear wandered into the camp again and Layton killed the bear as per DWR policy in dealing with aggressive bears.

The bear was a two- to three-year-old female bear that weighed about 130 pounds.

"We had to put the bear down because it lost its fear of humans and has become habituated to eating human food," Aoude said. "This is not a decision we take lightly. The one positive aspect of this incident is that the youths got a lesson in wildlife management from officer Vic Layton, who explained why we had to kill the bear and how to prevent future conflicts with bears."

As a safety precaution, the bear is now being tested for rabies.



Colton Stewart rolls up his sleeve and shows the bite marks left on him by a black bear

Photo by Scott Root

The DWR encourages campers to keep a clean camp site. It is very important to keep food locked up in the trunk of your car or in a container or canvas bag that can be hoisted off the ground by rope and kept away from bears.

Do not keep food inside tents or sleeping bags.

For more information about black bear safety, please visit wildlife.utah.gov/bear/bear_safety.html