

Bear Conflicts

Thank you for picking up this safety guide. Whether you want to know how to discourage bears from wandering onto your property, how to camp sensitively in bear country or just find out more about living with these amazing creatures, read on and make your experiences **Bear Safe**.

There is only one species of bear in the Smokies – the **black bear**. The safety issues in this guide are relevant to black bears, which are numerous in this area.



- All over the world, bears compete with humans for space, which leads to **conflict**.
- Every year in the USA, more people move into bear **habitat**, and many are not sufficiently prepared to deal with their wild neighbors.
- Every year in the USA, thousands of ‘nuisance’ bears have to be relocated or killed unnecessarily due to **careless** human behavior.
- **The Smokies support a large number of black bears. And an increasing number of humans are calling this area ‘home’ as well.**
- **Recreational activity** in the Smokies is reaching an all-time high.
- When humans carelessly leave food out, near a home or in a camp, bears see it as an easy meal and may become **‘food-conditioned’**.
- Food-conditioned bears associate humans, camps and homes with food rewards – they become **nuisance** animals when they repeatedly return for these rewards.
- Nuisance bears must be captured and relocated to another area or euthanized to prevent them from becoming an increased **danger** to people.
- Remember: **a fed bear is a dead bear.**
- It is up to us to learn how to live with bears and other **wildlife**.
- You can protect yourself, your family, belongings and bears by following the **simple steps** in this safety guide.

This guide folds out into a poster which includes important information about safety in bear country. Keep it with you while backpacking, or display it in your home.



True or false?

1. **A bear that stands on its hind legs is preparing to charge.**
FALSE. A bear that is standing on its hind legs is usually trying to identify you by scent or sight. Bears rarely attack, but when they do it is on all fours with their heads down.
2. **A bear’s sense of smell is better than a dog’s.**
TRUE. In fact, it is one of the most sensitive noses in the animal world.
3. **Bears are naturally aggressive towards humans.**
FALSE. Bears are shy, retiring creatures who only act aggressively as a last resort – usually when they feel threatened.
4. **The best way to get away from an aggressive bear is by running.**
FALSE. Bears can run as fast as a racehorse for short distances, and running may trigger their chase response. For the best course of action see the poster inside this guide.
5. **Bears cannot run downhill.**
FALSE. Bears can run faster than any human – in any direction.



Facts

- There are eight bear **species** in the world, three of which can be found in the USA (polar, brown/grizzly and black).
- Fewer than 1000 grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos*) remain in the lower 48 where they are considered threatened.
- The black bear is the only bear species found in the **Smokies**.
- **Black bears** (*Ursus americanus*) are common in the Smokies where they live mainly in the back country.
- Although scientifically classified as **carnivores**, bears are opportunistic omnivores: about 95% of their diet is vegetation, but they eat a wide variety of foods depending upon what is available. Wild bears are afraid of people.
- Black bears vary in **color** from black to cinnamon to blonde! However, in the Smokies, all bears are black in color.
- Average adult male black bears **weigh** 250 pounds, while females average 140 pounds. Grizzlies can be double this.
- Bears will generally **avoid humans**, but might be attracted to a backyard or campsite by the odor of food from a barbecue, garbage can, bird feeder, pet food or outdoor refrigerator.
- Bears are **strong** – they have been known to break windows, rip through convertible car tops, or bend open car doors in their search for food!

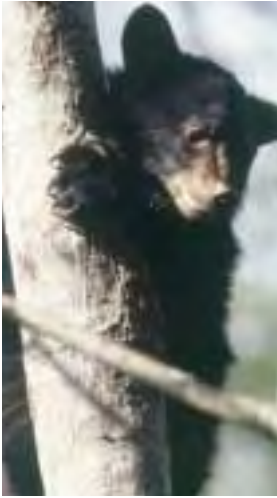


Photo by Appalachian Bear Center



Photo by Ken Jenkins

The Subject of this Safety Guide

What is a nuisance bear?

A bear is considered a *nuisance* when it becomes used to finding human food and garbage in areas where people live or recreate. Carelessly stored food, garbage, even barbecue grease and bird feeders can all attract bears and keep them coming back. The outcome is often a dead bear and even orphaned cubs. This problem can easily be solved by eliminating the source of the attraction. Becoming **Bear Safe** is as easy as following the simple steps outlined in this safety guide... enjoy learning about bears and how to live with them safely.

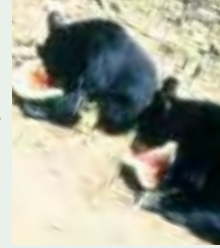


Photo by Appalachian Bear Center

Bear Safe is a program of educational activities designed to reduce conflicts between bears and humans by fostering an understanding of bears and an acceptance of them as a desired part of our wilderness.

This brochure has been directed and implemented by the Appalachian Bear Center with funding and support from the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) through 'Liberty – the world campaign for bears.'

For more information about Bear Safe activities or to make a donation, please contact:

Appalachian Bear Center

P.O. Box 364, Townsend, TN 37882
Phone: 865-448-0143 Fax: 865-448-0141
Web page: www.appbears.org

To make a charitable donation or find out about other WSPA activities, please contact:

WSPA, 34 Deloss Street, Framingham, MA 01702
Phone: 1-800-542-BEAR (2327)
Web page: www.wspa-usa.org

For additional copies of this safety guide please contact the Appalachian Bear Center.

None of the bears in this brochure were in captivity or in the care of ABC at the time the photographs were taken. Cover photo by Ken Jenkins.

Developed in cooperation with the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Bear Safe

SMOKY MOUNTAINS

sharing wilderness with wildlife



A guide to living safely with bears - tips for rural residents, hikers & campers



The Bear Necessities

Bears and humans – living together in rural areas near the Smokies

Bears are an amazing part of our wild heritage. If we can learn to live alongside these incredible animals, we will preserve the wilderness that makes the Smokies so special.

Try to look at your home or campsite from a bear's perspective. Use the guidelines below to help make life safer for bears and people.

Don't let YOUR carelessness cause the unnecessary death of a bear.

At your home or rental property

Garbage disposal/storage

- Don't leave food, scraps, garbage or pet food out for bears.
- Store garbage indoors or in bear-resistant garbage containers.
- Haul garbage to a dump site at least twice a week to avoid odors.
- If you have a pickup service, put garbage out an hour or two before the truck arrives – not the night before.
- If you're leaving several days before pickup, haul your garbage to a dump.
- Be particularly aware of very odorous food scraps such as fish and meat bones – store them in the freezer until garbage day.

Barbecuing

- Be alert when barbecuing. If bears are nearby, they may be attracted by the smell.
- If a bear approaches, move your family and any foods indoors immediately.
- Keep barbecue grills clean and free from grease. Store inside if possible.

Pets

- Do not leave pet food outside.

More helpful tips

- Composts, fruit trees and beehives are powerful bear attractants – enclose them with electric fencing.
- Don't put fish, meat or fruit into your compost. Use lime to reduce odors.
- Do not feed birds between April and November unless you use feeders that bears cannot reach and that have spill pans to prevent seeds from reaching the ground.
- Try to pick fruit from trees on your property regularly. Rotting fruit left on the ground is a powerful bear attractant.
- Avoid the use of outdoor refrigerators – they will attract bears.

When hiking

Seeing and avoiding bears

If you spend much time in the Smokies, the chances of seeing a black bear are quite reasonable. Watching bears in their natural environment from a safe, respectable distance can be incredibly thrilling. Positive experiences are far more common than negative ones. Although extremely rare, aggressive meetings between people and bears ('encounters') sometimes occur. To avoid them:

- Hike in a group and during daylight hours.
- Be aware. Learn about and watch for bear signs. Overturned rocks or broken-up, rotten logs can be a sign that a bear has been foraging for grubs or insects. Claw marks on trees, tracks in the dirt or snow, berries on the ground, plant root diggings or fur on the bark of trees are all signs that a bear has been in the area.
- Stay away from abundant food sources and dead animals – bears may be foraging in the area or protecting a carcass.



Photo by Ken Jenkins

At your campsite

Camp setup

- First: be aware of your surroundings – look at them from a bear's perspective.* Investigate your site before setting up camp and then establish a clean camp that is free from odors.
- Avoid camping near bear food sources such as berries. Never camp near an animal carcass, garbage or bear sign such as tracks, scat or tree scratchings.
- Do not cook or store food in or near your tent. Food odors on tent or gear may attract bears.
- Pick up food scraps around your site.
- Pitch tents in a line or a semicircle facing your cooking areas. You will be more likely to spot a bear that wanders into your camp and it will have a clear escape route.
- Sleep in a tent – not under the stars. Most black bears will not enter a tent with people in it.
- Never leave your gear (backpack) unattended. Always hang it as you would food (see below).

Food storage

- Don't forget! When caching your food and garbage you'll need: 100 feet of strong nylon accessory cord (1/8 inch minimum) and a carabiner (to attach bags to cord).
- Never leave food unattended, unless it is properly stored.
- DO NOT bring food or odorous non-food items into your tent. This includes toothpaste, perfume, deodorant, chocolate, candy and wrappers.
- Avoid canned foods with strong odors such as tuna. Wash cans after eating.
- Food should be placed in bear-resistant food storage containers (where available) or stored in your vehicle.
- Where this is not possible, cache your food: place food inside several layers of sealed plastic bags (to reduce odor) and a stuff-sac ('bear bags' or waterproof 'dry-bags' can be purchased for this use), find two trees that are 20 feet apart and hang the bags between them at least 15 feet from the ground using nylon cord and a carabiner. Some campsites provide communal bear cables for this purpose.
 - If only one tree is available, sling your bags at least 10 feet from the ground over a branch so that they hang at least 4 feet out from the tree trunk.
 - Remember to hang pots, utensils, cosmetics, toiletries and any other odorous items with your food and garbage.

Cooking

- NEVER cook or eat in your tent – it will smell of food and may attract bears. Avoid cooking greasy, odorous foods.
- Do not throw food, aluminum foil, cans, or glass in fire rings.
- If a bear approaches, frighten it by yelling, banging pans together, or throwing rocks. Do your best to ensure that a bear does not obtain food. This will lead to more serious problems in the future.
- Remove the clothes you wore while cooking before going to sleep. Store these clothes in your vehicle or with your food and garbage (see above).
- Wash all dishes immediately after eating. Dump water at least 100 yards from your campsite.

Garbage disposal/storage

- Never leave garbage unattended, unless it is properly stored.
- Pack out trash – do not bury or attempt to burn it.
- Garbage should be deposited in bear-resistant garbage containers or stored in your vehicle until it can be dumped.
- Where this is not possible, hang garbage in the same way as food (see above).
- Remember: "pack it in, pack it out". This includes ALL garbage (including biodegradable items such as fruit peels).

Bear encounters

Encounters with aggressive bears are extremely rare. Attacks are even rarer. Many millions of people live, work and recreate in the bear country of the Smokies and many experience the excitement of seeing bears, yet only one fatality by a black bear has been recorded here. The tips in this safety guide will help prevent bear-human conflicts, but it is always good to be prepared for an encounter. There is no fool-proof way of dealing with a bear encounter (each bear and encounter is different) but the following guidelines have worked in the past:

If a bear follows you

- If a bear persistently follows or approaches you without vocalizing or paw swatting, try changing your direction. If the bear continues to follow you, stand your ground. If the bear gets closer, talk loudly or shout at it. Act aggressively and try to intimidate the bear. Act together as a group if you have companions. Make yourselves look as large as possible (for example, move to higher ground). Throw NON-FOOD objects such as rocks at the bear. Use a deterrent such as a stout stick. Do not run and don't turn away from the bear. Don't leave food for the bear; this encourages further problems.
- Most injuries from black bear attacks are minor and result from a bear attempting to get at people's food. If the bear's behavior indicates that it is after your food and you are physically attacked, separate yourself from the food and slowly back away.
- If the bear shows no interest in your food and you're physically attacked, fight back aggressively with any available object – the bear may consider you as prey!

If you see a bear in the distance

- If you see a bear, remain watchful. DO NOT approach it. IF your presence causes the bear to change its behavior (stops feeding, changes its travel direction, watches you, etc.) YOU ARE TOO CLOSE. Being too close may promote aggressive behavior from the bear such as running toward you, making loud noises, or swatting the ground. The bear is demanding more space. Don't run, but slowly back away, watching the bear. Try to increase the distance between you and the bear. The bear will probably do the same.

If you need to report an incident

Please notify the National Park Service for reports inside the Park, or your local Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency office for all others.



Appalachian Bear Center

Web site: www.appbears.org • Tel: 865-448-0143



With funding and support from: [World Society for the Protection of Animals](http://www.wspa-international.org)

Web sites: www.wspa-international.org • www.wspa-usa.org • Tel: 1-800-542-BEAR (2327)



With special thanks to: [Insight Wildlife Management, Inc.](http://www.wilderness.ws)

Web site: www.wilderness.ws

Developed in cooperation with the [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](http://www.nps.gov) and the [Appalachian Bear Center](http://www.appbears.org).

Remember, bears are far more likely to enhance your wilderness experience than spoil it. Knowing how to interpret their behavior and act responsibly is part of the thrill of sharing forests and mountains with these amazing creatures.