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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Tips to Safely Enjoy Black Bears this Season**

Appalachian Bear Rescue offers tips to park visitors to avoid encounters and safely view black bears

**KNOXVILLE, Tenn.** May 4, 2012- As summer approaches, millions of people will head to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The Appalachian Bear Rescue (ABR), a Townsend-based rehabilitation center for orphaned and injured black bear cubs, offers some tips to ensure your safety and the safety of the park's bears.

"For many people, seeing a black bear is rare and thrilling; it can be a very memorable experience," said ABR spokeswoman Heather Ripley. "While most visitors know that feeding wildlife is against the law, many don't realize that disturbing wildlife is also a violation of federal regulations and they approach bears too closely."

According to Wildlife Biologist Bill Stiver, there are approximately 1,500 black bears living in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. This equals a density of about two bears per square mile. Here are seven tips to avoid encounters and safely view the black bears:

1. **Don't get too close.** Approaching a wild animal so closely that it changes its behavior means you are too close. Use binoculars or a camera with a zoom lens. Willfully approaching within 50 yards, or any distance that disturbs a bear is prohibited.
2. **Avoid surprising wildlife.** Never try to sneak up on a black bear to get a close look. Make noise. A startled bear may react defensively.
3. **Never surround a black bear with a group of people.** Black bears have been known to charge if they feel threatened.
4. **Never feed wildlife.** Wild animals should have a healthy fear of humans. Feeding black bears makes them dependent on humans for survival and can cause them to become bold in search of human food and garbage.
5. **Don't litter.** Dispose of your trash in bear-proof trash cans. Leaving food or garbage out teaches bears that garbage is easier to find than natural foods.

6. **Slowly back away.** If a black bear approaches you, slowly move away from the animal. If the bear continues to approach, make a lot of noise and make yourself look bigger by waving your arms. Never run from a bear.
7. **Teach others.** Spread the word and teach children about not disturbing wildlife when viewing them.

For more information, visit [www.abrtn.org](http://www.abrtn.org).

#### **About Appalachian Bear Rescue**

Appalachian Bear Rescue (ABR), located just outside the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Townsend, Tenn., is a one-of-a-kind rehabilitation center for orphaned and injured black bears and those in need of medical care. ABR is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization that has been returning black bears back to the wild since 1996. For more information about the Appalachian Bear Rescue, visit [www.appalachianbearrescue.org](http://www.appalachianbearrescue.org).

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