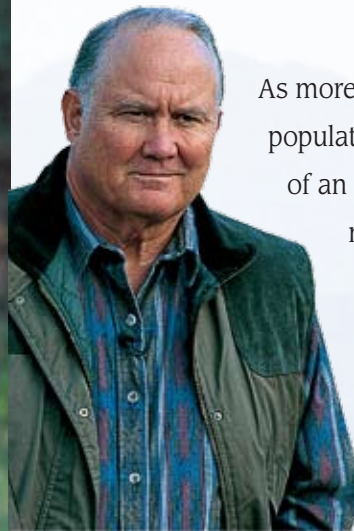


# Hiking in Black Bear Country



As more people recreate and bear populations increase, the chances of an encounter increase. We can minimize the chances of a conflict with a black bear while hiking by following basic bear avoidance safety precautions such as staying on trails, making noise to alert

bears of our presence, and not attempting to approach, follow, interact with, or feed them. When visiting bear country we are responsible for our own safety and the safety of the bears. Please treat bears and other wildlife with respect, courtesy, and caution, and help keep wildlife wild.

*General H. Norman Schwarzkopf,  
Spokesman for the Be Bear Aware and  
Wildlife Stewardship Campaign*

[www.BeBearAware.org](http://www.BeBearAware.org)



[www.bebearaware.org](http://www.bebearaware.org)





## BLACK BEARS AT A GLANCE

Black bears can be found across most of North America. Black bear habitat varies from the lowlands of Florida to mountains, deserts and subarctic tundra. Black bears can be found in and adjacent to metropolitan areas.

- ◆ **Colors:** Black, brown, blond, rust, or cinnamon. Rare colors are white and blue.
- ◆ **Size:** Adults measure about 3 feet at the shoulder and 5 to 6 feet when standing.
- ◆ **Weight:** Adults weigh 125 to 425+ lbs. Some can weigh as much as 700 lbs.
- ◆ **Life Span:** Approximately 20 years.
- ◆ **Eyesight:** Similar to humans.
- ◆ **Sense of Smell:** Excellent; can span miles.
- ◆ **Attributes:** Very agile; climb trees well; good swimmers; and can run as fast as 35 mph.

A black bear's diet can include acorns, berries, insects, vegetation, fish and other live prey, and carrion. They mate during May and early June. They hibernate between November and April when food is scarce, though this may vary. Healthy mothers produce 1-3 cubs.

## Bear Avoidance Precautions

- **Always follow local regulations** and review trailhead signs before hiking.
- **Let someone know where you're going** and when you plan to return.
- **Keep children close** and in sight at all times.
- **Stay on the trail.** Be aware of your surroundings, and scan ahead periodically.
- **Don't hike alone or at night.** Groups of four or more tend to make more noise, appear more formidable, and can provide one another with assistance. Although bears may be encountered any time, they are most active at dawn, at dusk, and at night.
- **Make your presence known.** Talk, sing, clap hands, call out "hey ho," etc., to alert bears of your presence. Don't rely on bells; they are too quiet.
- **View and photograph from established observation areas or the trail.** Use binoculars, spotting scopes, and telephoto lenses. Don't approach animals.



- **Don't try to interact with an animal** by offering food, throwing rocks, making noise, or trying to herd it. Allow the animal to go about its regular routine undisturbed.

- **Watch for bear signs** such as tracks, diggings, rocks/logs rolled over or torn apart, scat, and claw marks.



- **Avoid carcasses.** Report dead animals near a trail or campsite to a local wildlife management agency. Do not approach a carcass—a bear may be nearby.
- **If an animal approaches,** back away to maintain a safe distance. Don't try to pursue an animal that is leaving the area. Always leave an animal a clear line of travel.



- **Taking pets on hiking trails is not advised:** they may attract bears or cougars. Pets are not allowed on trails, in national parks or refuges. If pets are permitted, keep them on leashes at all times.
- **Avoid odorous items** such as food or beverages with strong odors or scented personal hygiene products.

- **A bear conditioned to hikers** may not leave the area when it hears people hiking on the trail. Allow the bear plenty of space to continue its activities undisturbed as you proceed out of the area.
- **Stay with your gear.** Don't leave packs, food, or beverages unattended. Hang these items out of reach of bears.



**CounterAssault.com**  
Grizzly Tough Bear Spray  
& Food Storage Units

## Wildlife Stewardship: For Your Safety and to Keep Wildlife Wild

- Give them the space to go about their daily routine undisturbed.
- Don't habituate them to your presence or condition them to your food or garbage.
- Please do not approach or follow or attempt to interact with and/or feed.
- Keep them wild for future generations to enjoy.



### Cougar Encounters

Cougars are quiet and elusive. Stay on the lookout for cougars in thick brush and behind fallen trees. They often only give a glimpse of themselves before disappearing. Repeated sightings should be treated with alarm. If a

cougar attacks, group together and fight back using sticks, rocks, and pans. Bear spray has been successfully used on cougars. Retreat to a place of safety. Never play dead.

### Snake Encounters

Snakes will try to avoid you if they can. To avoid snake encounters, always be very aware of where you're walking. Avoid stepping where you can't see, such as behind rocks or logs or in tall grass. Be careful when sitting down and when picking things up that a snake could hide under or behind. Don't attempt to approach, touch, or "wrangle" any snake—enjoy them safely and responsibly from a distance.





## Alligator Encounters

Alligators are opportunistic predators, so keep out of their reach by avoiding walking along banks and shorelines with vegeta-



tion that provide good cover. Only swim and recreate in designated areas. Alligators are most active at dusk, night, and dawn. Never approach, feed or try to touch an alligator.

## Too Close!



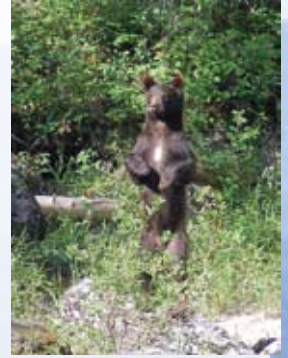
## Safety Precautions for Children

- Children should remain near parents and should always be in sight.
- Don't let them play in or near dense cover.
- Warn them never to approach animals, especially baby animals, and never to try to feed or pet wild animals.
- Never have a child pose for a photo with a wild animal, even if it appears tame.

**WILDLIFE + DISTANCE = SAFETY**  
**For Both People And Animals**

## Black Bear Encounters

Black bears are found throughout most of North America, including the outskirts of many metropolitan areas. Whether you are hiking locally or in a National Forest or Park, you may encounter a black bear. Knowing what to do will minimize the possibility of a confrontation.



Black bear attacks are rare and are often the result of people approaching or feeding them. All bears may suddenly and without warning become aggressive in defense of their space, cubs or food.

The best ways to avoid a confrontation with a bear are:

- Never approach or follow a bear (especially a cub).
- Stay on established trails.
- Hike during daylight hours—only.
- Hike in groups.
- Make your presence known—call out.
- Never feed bears or leave food accessible.
- Bears may be more aggressive during droughts, storms and forest fires.

## **WILDLIFE + DISTANCE = SAFETY** **For Both People And Animals**

A bear near the trail - If it is not practical to return the way you came and you are a safe distance away, let the bear know that you are there by calling out, "ho bear" and clapping your hands. In most cases the bear may move farther away from the trail. If the bear stays, group together and cautiously pass, monitoring the bears reaction. If the bear is too close to the trail, wait for it to move away then proceed.

**Sudden close encounters** - DO NOT PANIC!  
Calmly group together and pick up small children. Do not run, make sudden movements or direct aggressive eye contact. These actions may instinctively cause the black bear to charge.

If the black bear clacks its teeth, "woofs," pants, growls or slaps its paws on the ground, it is warning you to back off. Give the bear a chance to identify you as a human, and not a threat. Let the bear calm down and retreat. Now would be a good time to do the following:

- Assess the situation: Is this a female with cubs? How close is the bear? Is it possible that it's protecting a fresh kill? Is the bear acting in a predatory manner?
- Give the bear a chance to leave the area.
- Talk firmly in a low-pitched voice while backing away.
- Keep backpacks on for added protection.
- Retreat to a place of safety. Monitor the bear's response and adjust your actions accordingly.
- Bears usually leave at this point, but you should be prepared to use your bear spray or other weapon (i.e. walking sticks, rocks or branches).
- If the bear stands up, it is trying to identify what it smells and hears. It's NOT preparing to charge.
- Both black bears and grizzly bears can climb trees. Running to a tree may cause a bear to chase you.
- Always remain standing. Do not kneel or bend over.



**Predatory black bear behavior** can sometimes be identified by the following actions:

- Continues to follow or circle you or disappears and reappears.
- Enters your camping, sleeping or cooking

area either during the day or at night. Under these circumstances do not play dead.

**If the black bear continues to approach:** No matter how passive this bear appears, it is acting in a possible predatory or threatening manner if it continues to approach you. Your group should become increasingly aggressive by shouting "No! Go Away!" Throw rocks. Use your bear spray.

**If the black bear physically attacks you,** fight back by hitting its nose and eyes with your fists, and by kicking. Your hiking companions can help you fight with walking sticks, pans, branches, and rocks or their bear spray.

Always review the latest bear information provided by local wildlife and land management agencies, especially if you are planning to visit areas where there are grizzlies, brown bears or polar bears. Bear behavior may vary from species to species and sometimes from location to location.

Bear behavior is often a result of individual experiences. There is no single assured protective action to take during an encounter or attack. There is no guarantee of your safety or the safety of your property.





## Bear Spray

- Read the label—make sure you are purchasing bear spray, not personal defense spray. The label should clearly indicate that it is for deterring bears, not people.
- Active ingredients: 1–2% **Capsaicin** and **related capsaicinoids**. Look for EPA registration number on front of can.
- Recommended minimum spray distance is 25 feet.
- Spray duration is 6 seconds to allow for multiple charges/multiple bears, to compensate for wind, and so there is a reserve for the hike out.



### How to Use Bear Spray

- Bear spray isn't a substitute for following appropriate safety precautions.
- Bear spray should only be used on aggressive, charging or attacking bears.
- Don't spray tents, gear, or people with it.
- Practice removing the can from a hip holster and the safety clip from the trigger. Keep bear spray readily available.
- **Bear charging from a distance:** spray a short 2 to 3 second burst toward the bear; point can slightly downward; use side-to-side motion to create expanding cloud of spray the bear must pass through. If the bear continues approaching, continue to spray.
- **Close encounter:** spray at the front of the bear until it diverts its charge or makes contact. If the bear makes contact, play dead and wait for the spray to take effect. Bear spray has been shown to reduce length and severity of maulings.

The **Be Bear Aware Campaign** works in partnership with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the regional associations in the southeast, northeast, mid-west, and west. Other participants include the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee; the Wildlife Management Institute; the Wildlife Society; and hunting, fishing, outfitting and guiding organizations to inform the public about bear safety.

Please join with us by sharing this bear avoidance and wildlife stewardship safety material with family, neighbors, schools, and community organizations.

Your local, state, and federal wildlife and land management agencies have educational websites that can provide additional information. Their web addresses can be found in our agency directory at [www.BeBearAware.org](http://www.BeBearAware.org).

Photographs and educational concepts by Chuck Bartlebaugh; additional bear photographs by Milo Burcham and Drew Wilson/*Virginian Pilot*, and Bill Lee; design by the Graphic Arts Wildlife Fund; text development by Elizabeth Moore.

This brochure was peer reviewed by federal and state agency bear biologists.



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