

Living in Bear Country

If you live in bear country, here are some measures you can take to minimize the likelihood of negative encounters with bears (and other wildlife):

- Keep garbage in a secure location that cannot be accessed by bears; dispose of garbage in sanitary landfills or community bear-proof containers. Garbage should never be burned – burning often results in incomplete disposal that can still attract wildlife.
- Do not leave pet food outside.
- Use bird feeders during winter months only.
- Household items such as food, barbecues, cooking utensils and empty pet dishes attract bears. These items should always be kept in a secure building.
- Make sure that livestock feed and grain are stored in sturdy sealed structures (metal granaries are recommended).
- Livestock and wild game carcasses should be removed from your premises (free pick-up is available from many Alberta rendering plants).

If you experience livestock loss due to bear predation, contact the nearest Alberta SRD office. In many situations, a livestock predator compensation program may provide financial compensation for a portion of your loss. Your local Alberta SRD office can also provide additional information and advice on how to reduce livestock losses caused by bears and other predators.

Always be mentally prepared for the possibility of encountering a bear. Read and research bear behaviour and human encounters. This will better enable you to deal with a negative encounter should one occur.

Bear-Human Encounters

Although most bears are shy and will flee if they come across people, aggressive encounters occasionally occur, and there have been instances of serious mauling. Aggressive confrontations can occur when bears, especially females with cubs, are surprised at close range. As well, some bears may be provoked if they become used to eating human food.

There are no hard and fast rules about what to do in the event of an encounter with a bear. Bears react to people in different ways in different situations, depending upon the season, whether the bear is hungry, whether bear cubs are present, and whether there is an escape route available to the bear.

If You Encounter a Bear

- **Never run;** you cannot outrun a bear and running may excite the bear and cause an attack.
- Do not harass or chase the bear.
- If your vehicle is nearby, get in as quickly as possible.
- Stay calm and size up the situation; try to determine if the bear is a grizzly or a black bear.
- If bear cubs are in the area, move away from them.
- Slowly back away from the bear; if the bear continues to move toward you, drop your backpack or other belongings - this may distract the bear.
- Climbing a tree is an option but offers no guarantee of safety. Black bears are excellent climbers, and grizzlies have also been known to climb trees.
- In an encounter with a non-charging bear or a bear with cubs, you should appear passive; **do not raise your voice.**

If a Bear Charges You

In the event a grizzly bear charges you, your first strategy should be to act and appear **non-threatening**. The bear may simply be expressing its dominance. Once satisfied by a “bluff charge”, it may retreat; however, be aware that a bear may carry out several “bluff charges” during an encounter.

During a bear charge, experts recommend the following:

- Stand your ground and speak to the bear in a normal voice; this will ensure that the bear knows you are there, and that you are human.
- Avert your eyes, since a direct stare is perceived as a threat.
- If the bear continues to charge and gets closer, you could try to intimidate it by making direct eye contact, jumping up and down, shouting, or using pepper spray if you have it. ***(NOTE: Pepper spray is not a repellent; it is a weapon that is only effective in the animal’s eyes and nose. It will not repel bears from a sprayed area; in fact, there is evidence to suggest that bears are attracted to objects covered with pepper spray.)***

If you suspect that you are in a predatory situation with either a grizzly or a black bear, where the bear seems to be stalking you as potential prey, you should adopt a **dominant** stance - make direct eye contact, shout at the bear and act in a defiant manner. Keep in mind the following:

- Most serious black bear attacks are predatory; if an attack does appear predatory, act in a dominant manner and use any available weapon such as pepper spray, sticks, stones, or even your fists to fight off the bear.
- If no escape is possible and the bear knocks you to the ground, roll yourself into a “cannonball” position and play dead; cover your neck and head with your hands and arms until the bear leaves.
- If a black bear is attacking you, or you are attacked at night by either species, consider it a predatory attack and fight back, with your fists or any other item that will serve as a weapon.

It is the responsibility of those who work, live and recreate in bear country to learn as much as possible about bears, their behaviour, and how to prevent and react to attacks. You can do this by reading books or taking courses. Call the local SRD or Parks & Protected Areas office prior to entering bear country. As well, always report a bear incident to the nearest Alberta SRD office.

Bear Management

Conservation officers sometimes have to remove a nuisance bear from an area by live-trapping it. If you come across a bear trap **do not approach it**.

If you encounter a “problem bear” notice in the backcountry, leave the area immediately. It is illegal to enter an area that has been closed to the public because of a problem bear. People who do cross into such an area will be ticketed.

In southwestern Alberta, a grizzly bear strategy has been adopted that makes every effort to keep grizzlies, especially females with cubs, in their ecosystem by using aversion techniques instead of relocation. The Southwestern Alberta Grizzly Bear Strategy employs several innovative techniques such as removal of attractants, aversive conditioning, bear shepherding using Karelian bear dogs, road-killed wildlife carcass redistribution, and habitat management to reduce bear relocations out of the ecosystem.

For more information, contact any Parks & Protected Areas or Sustainable Resource Development office, or visit the SRD web site at www3.gov.ab.ca/srd

Remember: Prevention of bear encounters is the best option, for us and for bears.

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Bear In Mind



There are two bear species in Alberta - the black bear and the grizzly bear. Although negative human encounters with bears are rare, they do sometimes occur, so it’s important for people who enjoy the outdoors to be aware of some of the basics about the physical features, habits and habitats of bears.



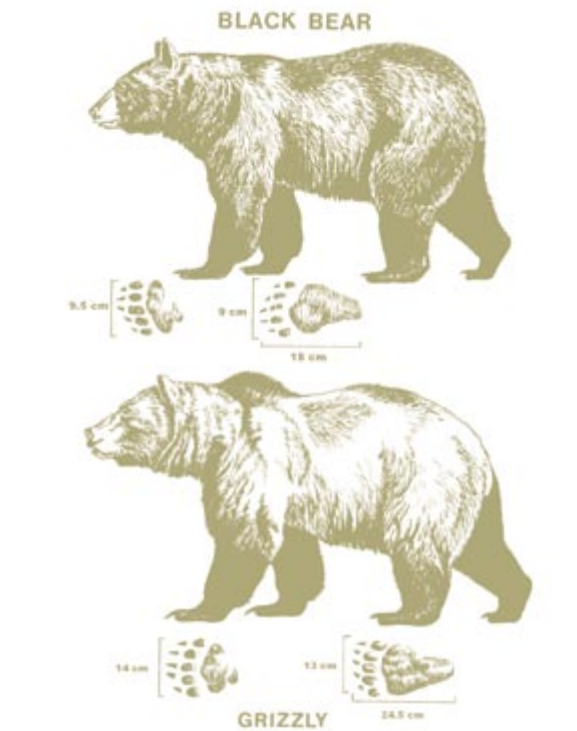


Current black bear range in Alberta encompasses approximately 480,000 square kilometres (roughly 74% of the province). Black bear sightings near the city of Edmonton and other parts of central Alberta suggest that black bears are extending their range. This map shows the distribution of black bears in Alberta in the early 1990s.

Present-day grizzly bear range is approximately 200,000 square kilometres, much smaller than a century ago, when grizzlies inhabited almost every part of Alberta. In recent years, there have been reports of grizzly bear sightings in areas that have been without grizzly populations for most of this century. Regional grizzly populations near Chinchaga River, Rocky Mountain House, and the area north of Waterton Lakes National Park appear to have increased since the 1960s.

Bear Identification

- Grizzly bears have a pronounced shoulder hump.
- Grizzly bears may have silver or light-tipped guard hairs on head, hump & back; black bears may appear more uniform in colour. Both species can range in colour from blonde to black.
- The grizzly’s ears are rounded and appear smaller overall, while the black bear has pointed and more noticeable ears.
- The grizzly’s nose is pig-like in appearance; the black bear’s dog-like.
- Black bear claws are relatively short (approximately 2.5 cm in length), and are usually black. Grizzly bear claws are longer (approximately 7.5 - 10 cm in length); grizzly claws may have a light-coloured strip.
- Grizzly and black bear tracks differ significantly, although in mud or snow the tracks may be indistinguishable.



Measurements represent average sized bears; some black bears are larger than some grizzlies.

Bear Sign

- Tracks
- Bear trails (bears are creatures of habit and return to familiar areas; they sometimes step in their own tracks, leaving a trail)
- Scats
- Rolled logs and rocks (bears search for insects to eat under these items)
- Torn stumps
- Rubbed, chewed and claw-marked trees
- Diggings
- Ant hills torn open

Like us, bears are omnivores, eating both plant and animal food. Unlike us, bears are opportunistic feeders who will eat almost anything, from toothpaste to ground squirrels. One way they gather food is by scavenging. They search for meals by rummaging and investigating possible food sources, and are quick to learn that when they see or smell humans, there’s a good chance food is nearby. You can help to prevent human-bear conflicts by using a few simple techniques at your campsite and while travelling in the backcountry. Minimum-impact outdoor practises will help to ensure that Alberta’s bear populations remain wild and viable.

- All bears can be dangerous and should be treated as such.
- Never feed or approach a bear.
- Avoid female bears with cubs; never go near a cub; a mother bear will aggressively protect her young.
- Remember to give bears a wide berth; they may look large and clumsy, but they can run much faster than people, both up and down hills (as fast as 65 kilometres per hour for short distances).

Preventing Bear Encounters

In Campgrounds

- Store your food and toilet articles (toothpaste, soap, deodorant, etc.) in the trunk of your vehicle; never take these items into your tent or tent trailer.
- Seal your garbage in plastic bags; use bear-proof bins to dispose of garbage.
- Water used for cleaning dishes and bathing should be disposed of in toilets or sealed in plastic bags and placed in bear-proof bins.
- Never burn or bury scrap food; bears have an extremely good sense of smell and are attracted by food odours.
- Use designated fish cleaning stations; never clean fish at your campsite.
- Keep young children close at hand, especially at night, dawn and dusk.
- Always keep pets on a leash or, better yet, leave your pet at home.
- At night, use a flashlight and move cautiously in and around your campsite.

On Day Hikes and Fishing Trips

- Make plenty of noise when approaching blind corners, dense shrubs and streams, and when walking into the wind; a loud shout every few minutes is more effective than wearing bear bells.
- It is best to leave your pet at home; however, if you do travel with a pet, keep it on a leash at all times (loose dogs can attract and irritate bears).
- Always keep your group together; be especially diligent in keeping the children in your party with you at all times.
- If you see signs of recent bear activity (i.e. fresh diggings along trails, bear scat, claw marks on trees), go back the way you came; it is better to cut your hike short than to risk an encounter with a bear.
- If you clean your fish in the backcountry, puncture the air bladder and throw the entrails into the lake or stream, seal the fish in plastic bags, and wash your hands to remove fish odours.
- Pack out all of your garbage in sealed bags.

On Backpacking Trips

- Follow all of the preceding precautions.
- Before your trip, leave your destination and estimated return time with authorities, family or friends.
- If possible, never travel alone in the backcountry.
- Use dried foods and a portable camp stove.
- Use designated backcountry campgrounds or camp in open areas away from game trails, streams and lakeshores.
- Ensure that your cooking area is well separated from your sleeping area to prevent food-odour contamination. Never sleep in the clothes you wear while cooking. Your cooking and food storage areas should be at least 100 metres from your tent to decrease the chances of you being in the way should a bear decide to check out your food supply.
- Hang your food, garbage and equipment high in a tree to discourage bears from investigating them. The tree should have a strong limb at least 3 metres above the ground; attach your rope to a rock and lob it over the branch; fasten food and equipment to one end and pull the load up to just below the branch; fasten the other end of the rope to the tree in at least two places.
- Never burn food scraps; always pack out your garbage.

Hunting in Bear Country

- Make every effort to remove your harvested animal in one trip or, failing that, in one day.
- If you must leave a carcass at a remote field camp or other location, hang it at least 100 metres from your camp; use extreme caution when approaching the carcass.
- When you return to the kill site, do so cautiously and make plenty of noise. Be aware that your kill may have attracted a bear.
- If there is a bear at your kill site, **do not attempt to chase it away**. Leave the site and leave the carcass to the bear. Report the incident to the nearest Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) office.