

RECREATING IN BEAR COUNTRY



The Northern Rockies is a wild place, and recreating means sharing the landscape with wildlife, including black bears and grizzly bears. With an awareness of what's around you, you can safely recreate in bear country.

If You are Hiking, Biking, Hunting, or Otherwise Recreating in Bear Country

- **Carry bear spray** in an accessible location on your person – in a chest or belt holster – and know how to use it.
- **Stay alert** and be prepared to deploy your bear spray, especially when hearing or visibility is limited.
- **Travel in groups and make noise** to alert bears of your presence. Hunters, who move quietly, should be extra vigilant in bear country.
- **Keep dogs on a leash.** An off-leash dog may spook or trigger a chase from a bear.
- **Slow down if you are biking, running, or moving fast.** Speed puts you at higher risk of surprising a bear, with less time to react.
- **Keep a lookout for bear sign** including prints, day beds, or scat. If you see bear sign, be vigilant and have your bear spray ready. Avoid signs of carcasses (foul odor or scavenger birds).
- **Avoid recreating at dawn and dusk** when bears are most active.



Credit: IGBC

BEAR SPRAY BASICS

Bear spray is a highly effective, non-lethal deterrent, as it temporarily incapacitates a bear when sprayed properly. Always recreate with each person carrying a full can of EPA-certified bear spray and make sure it is not expired.

Keep the safety lock on unless you think you may need to discharge the spray. While outdoors, practice taking the lock off quickly so it's second nature.

If you need to discharge your bear spray, remove the safety and spray before the bear reaches you so that it runs into the cloud of spray, about 2-3 seconds or until the bear is affected. Point slightly downwards, as a charging bear will be low to the ground.



Be Prepared, Not Scared

Bears want to avoid people and attacks are extremely rare.

Awareness and preparation allow you to enjoy the backcountry.

Camping in Bear Country

- Before you go, check with the local forest, park, or fish and game department to get information on bear activity, as well as food storage regulations.
- Avoid placing your campsite near any bear sign, such as scat or tracks.
- Do not leave food or anything with an odor (e.g., sunscreen or toothpaste) in your tent.
- Keep your bear spray with you at all times, including in your tent at night.
- Dispose of garbage in provided containers; otherwise, take it with you and dispose of it properly elsewhere. Do not bury or burn garbage.
- Properly store food, garbage, and anything with a scent. Use a bear box, certified bear-resistant container, a hard-sided vehicle unless for an extended time, or a food pole (see IGBConline.org for more about storing food).
- Cook and store any food and odorous items at least 100 yards away from your tent.

If You Encounter a Bear

- Stay calm: Most bear encounters do not result in an attack. Never run from a bear. Running can trigger a chase and you cannot outrun a bear.
- If you see a bear, stop and watch it so you can determine its behavior. Have your bear spray ready. If the bear is uninterested or not approaching, move away quietly and slowly. If the bear moves towards you or shows agitated behavior (jaws clacking, huffing, head swaying), remain still and speak in a calm manner until it moves away or you can leave the area undetected.

If a Bear Charges You

- Stand your ground. Remove the bear spray lock and use both hands to prepare to discharge.
- Discharge the bear spray, pointing slightly downward so the bear runs into it, when the bear is within range (closer than 25-30 feet).
- If the bear is making a defensive charge (defending cubs or a carcass), play dead if the bear makes contact, and cover your neck and head.
- If a bear follows or stalks you, approaches without appearing to defend cubs or a food source, or if a bear breaks into your tent, fight back any way you can in these situations.



Report bear encounters to the state wildlife management agency so that managers can take steps to ensure human safety and keep bears wild.

