



## **Black Bear Education for**

**Fred C. Andersen Scout Camp  
Kiwanis Scout Camp  
Many Point Scout Camp  
Phillippo Scout Camp  
Rum River Scout Camp  
Stearns Scout Camp  
Tomahawk Scout Camp**



## Introduction

As Scouts and Scouters of The Boy Scouts of America, our primary focus is on the safety of those who engage in the programs of this organization. Another focus is our traditional role of protection of our environment and the wildlife of our planet. It is our responsibility, as members of the Boy Scouts of America, to balance those focuses to both ensure human safety and harmony with nature.

A large step in realizing this goal is to educate those who will attend summer camp in wildlife interaction. To that end, each unit that will attend a Northern Star Council camp will be required to present wildlife interaction education concerning black bears. The unit leader will then be asked, upon arrival at camp, to certify that all members of the unit, including visitors of that unit, have participated in this education.

The information contained in this booklet is to be used by the units as a guide in their presentations.

It is not the intention of this material to cause panic or undue worry about bears at camp. Unit leaders should assess the maturity of the Scouts to whom this presentation is made. It is, however, important to adequately instruct all Scouts in the procedures contained herein.

When making your presentation to your units, you should stress the fact that in the sixty years of long term camping in Northern Star Council, there has been only one incident in which a bear encounter has led to human injury. That encounter was, in part, caused by human negligence in not strictly adhering to past policies regarding bears.

It is also important to remember that over the past years, approximately fourteen thousand Scouts and Scouters have camped in our camps on an annual basis.

In making this presentation, parents of Scouts should be told that there are bears in our various council camps. Parents must understand that our camps are not a "country club" but a quasi-wilderness that supports a wide variety of wildlife.

The following information, if correctly conveyed to units and strictly followed while at camp, will continue to keep those who enjoy the natural beauty of the camp and its informative programs safe for all who participate.

Conflicts between humans and bears can usually be avoided. More often than not, bears will avoid human contact. The encounters that do occur are usually the result of bears searching for food or surprise encounters on trails. The potential for each of these types of encounters can be greatly reduced by our conduct.

Black bears are the resident bears in northern Wisconsin and Minnesota. There are no grizzly bears. It is important to keep in mind that although the name "black" bear suggests that the bear is indeed black, that is not always the case. A black bear may be brown, cinnamon, gray, or even somewhat cream-colored. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources estimates that there are more than 24,000 black bears in the northern third of Wisconsin ("Black Bear Management", Wisconsin DNR). The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources estimates that there are approximately 12,000 - 15,000 black bears state wide ("Black Bear", Minnesota Department of Natural Resources). The Wisconsin and Minnesota DNR's predict that those numbers will grow in the coming years.

Most, if not just about all, bear encounters at summer camp occur when a bear enters one of the sub-camps in search of food. Bears, like most wild animals, are creatures of habit and instinct. Obviously their main instinct is to survive. To survive, a bear's primary objective is to find food. As humans continue to encroach on a bear's natural habitat, bears have learned that we humans provide a source of food in our garbage. Bears may become "habituated" to searching for food in or around areas which are inhabited by humans.

A "habituated" bear loses its natural fear of being near humans. A habituated bear will enter campsites while humans are present. A habituated bear, because of losing its natural fear of humans, may be more dangerous to humans because it will enter areas of human habitation. It is important that we do everything possible to make sure we do not habituate bears to searching campsites for food.



## Campsite Precautions

This section of the education material is directed to the precautions that must be taken in your campsite so as to avoid attracting bears.

**Camp Sanitation:** It is essential that campsites and their surrounding areas be kept clean of garbage, food, and smellables.

**Food:** This is the most important precaution. Food produces odors that attract bears in search of a meal. All food at camp must be stored in the steel campsite bear box, the trunk of a car, the troop trailer, or an appropriate bear bag. **No exceptions.**

**Food In Tents:** There is absolutely no excuse for eating or storing food in your tent. These foods will leave appealing odors that will attract bears. Empty snack wrappers, food boxes, juice boxes, soda cans, or even water bottles that have had flavored drinks mixed in them are not to be kept in tents. **Food of any kind must not be in a tent.**

**Cooking of Food:** If your unit cooks their own meals at camp, the cooking and dining area should be as far as possible from the sleeping tents.

**Clean Up After Meals:** Meals eaten in your campsite must be properly cleaned up. Dishes should be done immediately following completion of the meal. Leftovers should be properly disposed of or stored as described above. Tables used for food preparation and eating must be washed. Food spilled on the ground must be picked up. Non-water liquid spills must be cleaned up by removing the soil that is contaminated with the spill.

**Snacks:** Snacks must be stored in the manner described above for food. Any drinks besides water (soda, powdered beverages, juice boxes, etc.) must never be stored or consumed in a tent. Spills from these products give off odors that are very appealing to bears.

**Garbage:** Garbage cannot remain unattended in areas accessible to wildlife. Besides inviting bears, garbage also invites other wildlife such as squirrels or raccoons into your campsite. Garbage should be properly bagged and disposed of in the approved areas. Make sure that any leakage from your garbage bag is properly cleaned up: this may require removal of some of the soil under a spill.

**Other Smellables:** Food is not the only thing that gives off pleasing odors to bears. Other items such as toothpaste, mouthwash, deodorant, soap, shampoos, lotion, sunscreen, and other personal hygiene products give produce odors that bears find appealing. These products must be stored in the same manner as food. **Never store such smellables in your tent.**

**Personal Hygiene:** During the day, your clothing and parts of your body may pick up odors from food, snacks, fishing, etc. You should wash your hands and face every night before turning in for the night.

If you have spilled food on your clothing, do not keep that piece of clothing in your tent. Either properly clean the clothing or store it with the food items until it can be washed. Clotheslines used for "airing out" clothes should not be placed near the sleeping tents.

Showers should be taken while at camp. However, remember that the products you use to shower with are smellables and may leave appealing odors to bears on you. It is suggested that you shower in the morning or no later than mid-afternoon if possible.

**Fishing:** Fish should not be cleaned in your campsite. This is a natural food item for bears and the smell of fish entrails may attract bears.

It is important to recognize that although the above precautions are important and are expected to be followed, they will not prevent a bear from entering your campsite. A bear searching for food and not finding it will quickly leave the area.



## What to do if a Black Bear Enters Your Campsite

We have now discussed the precautions to take to make your campsite less appealing to a bear looking for a meal. So, what do you do if a bear actually enters your campsite?

Although most active at dawn and dusk, black bears may wander into your campsite unannounced at any time.

In a typical year at camp, it is estimated that black bears are sighted entering campsites four or five times. It is also important to keep in mind that their natural food source (berries, roots, etc.) will play a large role in a bear's search for food outside of the forest. In years when the berry crop is poor, a black bear may be more prone to enter a campsite in search of food. In years when the berry crop is abundant, a black bear is more than happy to stay in the forest, away from human encounters.

First of all, remember that in sixty years of camping, bears have always entered campsites and except for one time, there have been no injuries. If a bear enters your campsite while campers are present, stay calm. The bear is looking for food and it is important to remember that we are not a natural item on the bear's menu. It is, however, always important to remember that any bear encounter has the possibility of danger to humans. The following steps must be taken in the event of a bear entering your campsite while campers are present.

- a. Safety must always be the primary concern. Do not endanger yourself or others for the protection of personal property or equipment.
- b. Gather all those in the campsite at the spot in camp opposite of where the bear is located.
- c. Stay together. As the old saying goes, "there is strength in numbers".
- d. Maintain a distance of at least forty feet from the bear.
- e. Post pairs of adults or older Scouts at the path entrances to your campsite so as to warn those about to enter the camp that there is a bear present.

- f. Make noise, and plenty of it. Bang pots and pans together if available (do not endanger your safety by trying to gather such items if located too close to the bear). Yell and scream. Wave your arms in the air. It is important to keep in mind that studies have shown that it is much easier to scare off a bear before it has found food. Once it has found food, it is much less likely to be scared off until after it has finished its meal.
- g. Never throw things at the bear. This can only make the bear angry.
- h. Never "charge" at the bear or run at it in an attempt to scare it off.
- i. Do not attempt to use pepper spray or similar bear "repellant" products to repel a wandering bear. Some work and some don't. Use of such products may turn a bear that is only hungry into a very angry bear.
- j. If your efforts to scare off the bear do not work, everyone should leave the camp for a minimum of thirty minutes. People posted at trail entrances to your campsite should remain there to warn of the bear's presence.
- k. Report the bear in your campsite to a camp staff member immediately.
- l. If the bear had been successful in finding food in your campsite, upon the unit's return to the camp, clean the site. Determine what efforts must be taken to correct the circumstances that led to the bear being able to find food in your campsite.
- m. Finally, if the bear was successful in finding food, you should expect a return visit from that same bear at approximately the same time the following day. Bears usually have specific routines and routes that they follow in search of food. If the bear was successful in finding food at your campsite, your campsite was just added to that bear's daily route. Bears are creatures of habit.



## What to do if a Black Bear is Near Your (Occupied) Tent

This type of encounter can be one of the most alarming to a Scout or Scouter. Although there have been limited reports of bears sticking their heads into tents to sniff around, there has been no actual report of a bear entering a tent at one of our camps. Keep in mind that the bear is searching for food and that you are not on the bear's natural menu. If a bear enters your tent, it is typically caused by a violation of the bear policy rules. These types of encounters are **very** rare, but if a bear should be wandering around your tent while you are in the tent, do the following:

- **You must** avoid your natural instinct to jump and run. Such a response from you may trigger the bear's natural instinct to chase you.
- Remain as calm as possible.
- Tell your tent mate that there is a bear around your tent.
- Speaking in a loud but calm voice to let the bear know you are there.
- **Do not attempt to hit or throw things at the bear.**
- In a calm voice, call for your adult leaders by saying your name and that there is a bear around your tent.
- Stay in your sleeping bag and remain still.
- In the incredibly unlikely event that the bear begins to attack you, ignore all earlier advice and using any means possible. Scream for help. If you have bear repellent, this is the only time it should be used.

## Black Bear Encounters

It is the natural instinct of wild animals to avoid contact with humans. They know encounters can present dangers to them and they are afraid of us.

Perhaps the most dangerous human-bear encounters are the "surprise" encounters. These types of encounters usually occur when you unexpectedly come across a bear. These types of encounters can be easily avoided.

When members of your unit are out on the trails, the following precautions should be taken:

- The buddy system must be in use at all times.
- Hikers should make noise as they are hiking. Bears have extraordinary hearing. If they hear approaching humans, they will usually leave the area. There is a good chance that by making noise, you will never know a bear was present.
- If you should come across a bear while hiking, remain calm and avoid any sudden movement.
- Give the bear plenty of room, allowing it to continue its activities undisturbed. Every bear has a "zone of danger" or "personal space". If you enter that space, the bear will become agitated and unpredictable in its behavior. If the bear changes its natural behavior, such as feeding, foraging, resting, etc. because of your presence, you are close enough to have invaded that space.
- If you spot a bear and it is not aware of you, detour quickly and quietly away from the area.
- Avoid turning and fleeing from a bear. This may trigger the bear's natural predatory instinct and it may chase you. Black bears can run up to 35 mph. You won't outrun the bear.



- If you spot a bear and it is aware of you, but you do not seem to be in its space, try to get its attention while you are still a good distance from the bear. Help the bear to recognize that you are a human by talking in a normal voice and waving your arms. If the bear cannot tell what you are, it may come closer to investigate. A bear may stand on its hind legs to get a better look at you. You should know that a standing bear is usually a curious bear, not a threatening bear.
- It should be stressed that Scouts should avoid bear cubs. Bear cubs travel with mother bears. Although there are many studies that indicate that mother black bears are not as protective of their cubs as we tend to believe, it is better for us to believe that mother bears are very protective of their offspring. Avoid a bear cub just as you should an adult bear.



## Black Bear Attack Statistics

Proper education in human-bear encounters must include information about bear attacks and what to do if attacked. However, this information may lead to anxiety or an unnatural fear of bear attacks.

In order to reduce the potential fear, we've compiled some statistics to put into perspective how uncommon black bear attacks are:

- There are an estimated 740,000 to 940,000 black bears in North America, of which 340,000 to 465,000 are in the United States ("Black Bear Population by State", Wildlife Informer).
- There have been twenty-seven recorded deaths by black bears in all of North America from 2000 to 2020. Fifteen of these fatal attacks were in Canada or Alaska ("List of Fatal Bear Attacks in North America", Wikipedia).
- From 1900 to now, there has been an average of 1 black bear attack per year and 1 death every 2 years worldwide ("Are Black Bears Dangerous?", Greenbelly).
- In comparison, grizzly bears have an estimated population of 55,000, approximately one-sixteenth the size of black bears ("Grizzly Bear Population by State", AZ Animals). There were 664 credible, reported grizzly bear attacks from 2000 to 2015, an average of 44 per year. Of these, 95 ended with the death of the person involved and the remaining 568 ended in injury (G. Bombieri et al. "Brown Bear Attacks on Humans: A Worldwide Perspective").
  - As a reminder, grizzly bears do not live in this area.

It is important to remember that the number of attacks compared to the number of black bear and human interactions is **very** small. It is clear that black bears are not interested in hurting or eating people. Instead, think of them as large animals on a stroll for some food, and you are not it.



## How to Deal With a Black Bear Attack

There are many differences in attacks by black bears and grizzly bears. The following are the widely accepted responses to attacks by black bears:

- Black bears, when threatened, may engage in a “bluff charge.” The bear may charge the person, breaking off the charge at the last minute. Such bluff attacks may occur more than once in a situation.
- A black bear may make popping noises and paw the ground when it is angry and about to charge.
- In a charge, stand your ground. Do not turn and flee as this may trigger the bear’s predatory instinct to chase you. An adult black bear can run at 35 mph, much faster than a human can run.
- If charged, do not climb a tree. Black bears can climb a 30 foot tree faster than a human can run 30 feet on flat ground.
- If you are attacked by a black bear, do not play dead. If the bear continues to attack you, it is looking at you as a meal. FIGHT BACK using any weapon you may have. Anything you can use to inflict pain upon the bear in your effort to break off its attack.
- In a typical scenario where a black bear is acting as a predator toward someone, it will continue to slowly approach them in daylight, perhaps circling them before rushing them. If a bear exhibits this type of behavior, you must be prepared to defend yourself.

## Conclusion

Being active in the outdoors will lead to encounters with wildlife. The intention of this booklet is to prepare you to address such encounters.

While there is no process that can fully prepare a person for encounters with potentially dangerous wildlife, common sense and a few rules will make our stays at camp safe.

## Northern Star Bear Policy Violation Consequences

Violation	1st Consequence	2nd Consequence
Baiting	Those involved will be required to leave camp (no refunds).	Entire unit will be required to leave (no refunds).
Litter in campsite or improper disposal of food or other smellables	The unit will be required to clean up the site and perform a service project.	The unit will be required to leave (no refunds) and will lose their campsite for the following year.
Improper food or other smellables storage	Those involved must correct action and perform a service project.	Those involved will be required to leave camp (no refunds).
Food in tent	Those involved must correct action and perform a service project.	Those involved will be asked to leave camp. (no refunds).
Harassment of bear(s) or any other violation	Discipline will be at the discretion of Camp Director.	Discipline will be at the discretion of the Camp Director.

Consequences are necessary for the safety of all campers and staff.



## Bear Policy Statement of Understanding

Please fill out this page to turn in upon check-in at camp.

As the authorized unit leader, I acknowledge on behalf of the entire unit listed below that:

- The members of my unit and those associated with my unit have been informed of the bear policies of Northern Star Council.
- The members of my unit and those associated with my unit have been fully informed of the potential consequences of the violation of the bear policies of Northern Star Council.
- The violation of the policy by any number of members of the unit or those associated with the unit may lead to consequences for the entire unit including, but not limited to, the immediate expulsion of the entire unit from Northern Star Council property with forfeiture of any paid fees.

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Print Name

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Unit

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Signature

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Date

## Works Cited

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