



Black Bear Education for

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



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 fifteen 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.

Bear encounters at Northern Star Council camps result in excitement but little more than that. 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 in color, it may be cinnamon in color, it may be gray, it may even be somewhat cream-colored. A 2005 Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources report estimated that there were approximately 13,000 black bears in the northern third of Wisconsin. A 2003 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources report estimated that there were approximately 27,000 black bears state wide. The Wisconsin and Minnesota DNR's predict that those numbers will grow in the coming years.

Most, if not just about all, of 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 only because it will enter areas of human habitation. It is important that when at camp 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.

Food: This is perhaps the most important precaution to be taken. 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. **THERE CAN BE NO EXCEPTIONS TO THIS RULE.**

Food In Tents: There simply is absolutely no excuse for eating food, your meals or snacks, 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 NEVER BE STORED IN A TENT.**



Cooking of Food: If your unit is one of the units that cooks it owns 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 means that you must properly clean up after the meal. Dishes should be done immediately following completion of the meal. Leftovers should be properly disposed of or stored as food in the manner described above. All tables used in food preparation and eating must be washed. Food spilled on the ground must be picked up. Liquid food spills must be cleaned up by removing the soil that is contaminated with the spill.

Snacks: Many Scouts and Scouters bring snacks to camp for their week-long stay. Although this practice is discouraged, it is recognized.

SNACKS ARE FOOD. SNACKS MUST NEVER BE EATEN IN A TENT. Snacks must be stored in the same manner as food is stored as described above. Snacks also include beverages other than water. Soda pop, powdered beverages, juice boxes, or other drinks must never be consumed in a tent. Spills from these products give off odors that are very appealing to bears.

Garbage: Garbage must not be allowed to remain in an empty campsite. Besides inviting bears, garbage will also invite the "mini bears" into your campsite. Garbage should be properly bagged and disposed of in the approved sites at all camps. Make sure that any leakage from your garbage bag is properly cleaned up as well. This again, may require removal of some of the soil under any spill.

Other "Smellables": Food is not the only thing that gives off pleasing odors to bears. Other things such as toothpaste, mouthwash, deodorant, soap, shampoos and other personal hygiene products give off odors that bears find appealing and thus may attract bears. These products must be stored in the same manner as food is stored. 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 in areas 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 bear-appealing odors 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 im-



portant to follow, and are expected to be followed, they will not necessarily prevent a bear from entering your campsite. A bear looking for food and not finding it will quickly leave the area.

It is important to stress to your Scouts, especially the younger ones, that in fifty years of camping at council camps there has been only one human injury caused by bears.

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

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.

WHAT TO DO IF A BEAR ENTERS YOUR CAMP

First of all, remember that in fifty 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 Scouters, other adults, or older Scouts - in pairs - at the path entrances to your campsite so as to warn those about to enter the camp that there is a bear present.



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- f. Make noise, and plenty of it. Bang pots and pans together if available (Never 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 may 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. 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. Those posted at trail entrances to your campsite should remain there to warn of the bear's presence.
 - k. Report the bear's entrance to 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. Remember, they are creatures of habit.)

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 entirely entering a tent at resident camp. Obviously, this type of encounter can be most alarming to a Scout or Scouter. Keep in mind that the bear is searching for food. Keep in mind again, that you are not on the bear's natural menu. If a bear enters your tent, there is a reason for it and



that reason will probably be one that has been caused by your violation of the bear policy rules. Keep in mind that these types of encounters are very, very, very rare. But, if a bear should be wandering around your tent or actually enter your tent at night 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 predatory instinct to chase you.
- Remain calm (I know, harder to do than to suggest)
- Begin speaking in a loud but calm voice to let the bear know you are there.
- Do not attempt to hit the bear or throw things at the bear.
- In a calm voice call for your adult leaders, letting them know your name and that there is a bear in or around your tent.
- Stay in your sleeping bag and remain still.
- Make sure that you tell your tent mate that there is a bear in or around your tent.
- In the very unlikely event that the bear begins to attack you, all bets are off and you should fight back using any means possible. Of course, the calm voice no longer applies and you should scream for help. (Unit leaders: Use your discretion in instructing on this issue. However, it is a must that your Scouts be prepared for this highly unusual and rare situation.)

As stated earlier in these materials, it is the natural instinct of wild animals to avoid contact with humans. They know that such encounters can present dangers to them and they are just as afraid of us as we are of them.

Perhaps the most dangerous human-bear encounters are the "surprise" encounters. These types of encounters usually occur when people are out hiking and unexpectedly come across a bear. These types of encounters are very easily avoided.

When members of your unit are out hiking the trails, the following precau-



tions should be taken.

- The "buddy system" must be in use at all times.
- The hikers should make noise as they are hiking. Bears have extraordinary hearing and if they are able to hear approaching humans they will leave the area, with the chances being that you will never even know that 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 "zone of danger" or "personal space". That bear may then act in an aggressive manner (discussed later).
- If you spot a bear and it is not aware of you, detour quickly and quietly away from the area.
- If you spot a bear and it is aware of you, but you do not seem to be in its "zone of danger" or "personal 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 to it 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. This can be an alarming site. However, you should know that a standing bear is more often than not a curious bear, and not a threatening bear.
- Avoid turning and fleeing from a bear. This may trigger the bear's natural predatory instinct and it may chase you. You should know that bears can run at 30 to 40 mph. You won't outrun the bear!
- Do not throw things at the bear. This includes food.



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- Of course, it should be stressed that Scouts should avoid bear cubs. Bear cubs come with mother bears. Although there are recent studies that may indicate that mother bears are not as protective of their cubs as we tend to believe, it is better for us to go on believing that mother bears are very protective of their offspring. Bear cubs should never be chased. Bear cubs should never be treed by Scouts. Bear cubs should not be harassed in any way!





The following section will be perhaps the most difficult for unit leaders to address with their Scouts. The information may lead to anxiety among the Scouts. It may cause unnatural fear of bear attacks. However, a proper education in human - bear encounters must include this information.

BEAR ATTACKS

It should be emphasized that following the rules, as set forth in this educational material, will greatly reduce any chance of any bear encounter.

The following information, from Stephen Herrero's recent book, may be shared with your Scouts.

- Records concerning bear attacks in North America have been compiled since 1900.
- Those records indicate a total of 23 deaths from 1900 to 1980 caused by black bears.
- Between 1960 and 1980 there were more than 500 human injuries caused by black bears. This may sound like a lot, but one must consider that the number of black bears in North America is about ten times greater than the number of grizzly bears. Over 90% of those injuries inflicted by black bears were minor.
- The small incidence of major injuries caused by black bears sharply contrasts with the grizzly bear situation, where more than half of the injuries caused by grizzlies were major injuries.
- 90% of the death and major injuries inflicted by black bears appear to have been caused by predatory situations. (Where the black bear was actually attacking to kill and eat a person) [Remember there are only 23 recorded deaths by black bears - in ALL OF NORTH AMERICA-dating back to 1900]

It is important to keep in mind that reported deaths by black bears are really a very small number when considering the amount of people who have been exposed to human-bear encounters over the last 103 years. During the period of 1960 to 1980, it has been calculated that 77,000,000 recreations days have been spent by humans in black bear populated areas. During this period only three black bear inflicted injuries were reported. All of the injuries were minor, caused by either a bite or paw swipe



through a tent.

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 response to chase you.
- If charged, do not climb a tree. This may work when trying to evade a grizzly bear, but black bears are very good tree climbers!
- If you are attacked by a black bear, DO NOT play dead. If the bear continues its attack on you, it is looking at you as a meal. FIGHT BACK using any weapon you may have, including knives, rocks, branches, logs, your fists, anything you can use to inflict pain upon the bear in your effort to break off its attack.
- Mr. Herrero, in his book, concludes that it is mainly wild black bears, found in remote wilderness areas, which have had no previous encounters with humans, that are primarily responsible for predacious attacks.
- A typical scenario where a black bear is acting as a predator toward a human is one in which the bear continues to slowly approach the human in daylight, perhaps circling the person and then rushing the person. If a bear exhibits this type of behavior you must be prepared to defend yourself.

CONCLUSION

The education process is not meant to cause anxiety among the Scouts or their parents. Being active in the outdoors will lead to encounters with wildlife. It is the intention of this material to prepare the campers who attend camp to be prepared to address such encounters.

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

Northern Star Council Bear Policy Violation Consequences*



Violation	1st Consequence	2nd Consequence
Baiting	Those involved will be required to leave camp- NO REFUND	
Litter in campsite or improper disposal of food or smellables	Troop will be put on alert and required to clean up site and perform a service project	Troop will be asked to leave with no refund and lose campsite for following year
Improper food or smellables storage	Participants involved must correct action and perform a service project	Participants involved will be asked to leave camp with no refund
Food in tent	Participants involved must correct action and perform a service project	Participants involved will be asked to leave camp with 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 Reservation Director

Bear Policy Statement of Understanding

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

As the authorized unit leader, I acknowledge that the members of my unit have been informed of the bear policies of Northern Star Council. I also acknowledge that members of the unit, and those associated with the unit, have been fully informed of the potential consequences of violation of said policies.

The unit further acknowledges, as a whole, that violation of the policy by one member of the unit may lead to consequences for the entire

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



unit including, but not limited to, the immediate expulsion of the entire unit from Northern Star Council property with forfeiture of any paid fees.

Print Name

Troop/Crew

Signature

Date



ⁱ Erickson, Albert W., John Nellor, and George A. Petrides. 1964. The black bear in Michigan. Research Bulletin No. 4, Michigan State University, Agriculture Experimental Station, East Lansing, Michigan, *as cited in* Herrero, Stephen, Bear Attacks, Their Causes and Avoidance, Revised Edition, 2002, p. 86.

ⁱⁱ Stephen Herrero is considered by many to be the leading North American expert on bear attacks and education in avoiding and responding to such attacks.

ⁱⁱⁱ Herrero, Stephen, Bear Attacks, Their Causes and Avoidance, Revised Edition, 2002, p. 91.

^{iv} *id.*, at p.79

^{vi} *id*

^{vii} *id.*,at p. 91

^{viii} *id.*, at p.106, citing data provided by Mr. John O'Pezio, black bear specialist, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

id., at p.104



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Revision: November 2018