



LIVING WITH BEARS IN ARIZONA'S HIGH COUNTRY

Bears are a part of life in Arizona. The black bear is the only bear species found in the state. Although fur color varies and includes brown, cinnamon and blond, they are all considered black bears. Black bears are the most widely-distributed North American bear.



Bears and humans are sharing more of the same habitats as development occurs throughout the state, and as more and more people enjoy spending time with friends and family in bear habitat. As bears search for food, they are often attracted to homes and close proximity to people. This often leads to conflicts between bears and people. Most conflicts are a result of people unintentionally feeding bears by allowing bears to access household garbage or bird feeders, both seed and hummingbird-type feeders.



WHAT ATTRACTS BEARS?

Bears visit areas of human use because of one thing, **FOOD**. Bears are attracted to household garbage stored outside, birdseed, pet food, and even fruit trees. Drought, wildfire, loss of habitat (development), and search for new living spaces are a few reasons bears roam farther in search of new food sources.

WHAT KEEPS BEARS AWAY?

Living in bear country, the possibility of having a bear visit your neighborhood is always a reality. What we do not want is for a bear to find a food source, resulting in bear vs. human conflict. Since garbage stored outside is the primary attractant, storing garbage in a garage or shed until the morning of collection virtually will eliminate the chance of a bear becoming a problem. What if you are not able to put your garbage out on pickup day? Having a neighbor or

friend put it out for you is an option, or taking weekend garbage to a dumpster or home with you will also prevent it from being available to bears.

WHY NOT JUST MOVE A PROBLEM BEAR?

Recognizing the potential risk to both humans and bears, the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) spends considerable time and money each year relocating bears. Unfortunately, this effort does little for the bears or people. Some bears must be destroyed because they are considered too dangerous, lost their fear of people, or are highly likely to become offenders again. After relocating a bear, homeowners, neighbors or other campers may experience more problems from another bear if the original attractant is not eliminated. Relocation of a bear is also traumatic for the animal and does not guarantee that the bear will survive in its new location. Competition with resident bears and lack of knowledge of local food sources and water availability all contribute to the possibility that the relocated bear may not survive.



WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SEE A BEAR IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD?

First, never approach a bear. Bears are usually afraid of people, but if they start to associate people with food they may become aggressive. If you see a bear in your yard or neighborhood, immediately contact your local AGFD office. For Forest Lakes and surrounding area, the office is in Pinetop. AGFD employees can be reached from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday – Friday, except state holidays at 928-367-4281. For weekends, holidays and after 5 p.m., call the Operation Game Thief hotline at **1-800-352-0700**. For **emergencies** call the Coconino County Sheriff's office at 911.



Depending on what the bear is doing, AGFD personnel may respond immediately or may just take the information you provide for future consideration on appropriate action. Not all bear sightings will require immediate action, but the more information you provide will help them make the best possible decision.

If you see a bear at a distance, alter your route to avoid it. On the rare occasion a bear approaches you, discourage it by:

- Making yourself as large and imposing as possible, stand upright and wave your arms, jacket or other item, and make noise.
- Do not run, a bear is twice as fast as a human, and never play dead, fight back if necessary.

- Give the bear a chance to leave the area, do not corner it. If it climbs a tree, give it space to leave the area.
- If a bear does not leave, stay calm, continue to face it and slowly back away. Call AGFD immediately.

CAN I KILL, INJURE OR HARM A BEAR IN MY YARD?

It is your responsibility to know the law. Bears are classified as big game animals by AGFD and are protected by state law. Bears can only be captured or killed by AGFD, legally permitted hunters lawfully hunting, or in defense of yourself or another person. **SO, WHAT CAN I DO TO DISCOURAGE BEARS?**

Take responsibility for not attracting them. Work with neighbors or friends to achieve a constant solution to a problem. Follow these tips to discourage bears from becoming a problem:

- Store garbage inside a secure building or in a bear-proof designed container.
- Place trash out for pickup at the latest possible time or don't put your trash out until the day of collection.
- Hang bird feeders as high as possible, away from buildings and porches, and use a tray to catch spills. It is recommended to bring feeders in at night, and/or even stop feeding for a couple days if you know a bear has been in the area. Tell your neighbors there is a bear in the area and ask them to do the same.
- Do not put other food items out for wildlife.
- Feed pets indoors or remove uneaten portions between feedings.
- Maintain a clean BBQ.
- Do not leave food in vehicles or the back of pickups. A hard cover or cooler is not enough to stop a hungry bear.
- Plant fruit trees away from a residence and pick up fallen fruit.



Remember, that you live in bear country, by following a few simple steps you can help a good bear stay a good bear and not become a problem bear.

A FED BEAR IS A DEAD BEAR
