

BEARS AND AGRICULTURE – FAST FACT SHEET

Bears range throughout BC, including agricultural land, and will consume crops, beehives and occasionally livestock. Bears can be encountered in many different situations and are generally tolerant of humans and their activities, preferring to be left alone and undisturbed. Conflicts develop when bears are allowed to access human food sources and lose their fear and respect for people. It is our responsibility to discourage bears from becoming a nuisance or a danger.

- ✚ Black bears damage orchards and vineyards by breaking down trees and branches in their attempts to reach fruit. They will often return repeatedly once feeding starts. Due to the perennial nature of orchard and vineyard damage, losses can be economically significant.
- ✚ Black bears are almost the only animals other than skunks that molest beehives. Evidence of bear damage includes broken and scattered combs, and hives with claw and tooth marks.

How to Avoid Conflicts

✚ Pet and livestock food

- Keep outdoor storage containers, such as those for pet foods and livestock feed, air-tight and odour free. Use bear-resistant containers whenever possible, or better still, keep supplies indoors.
- Do not leave garbage, pet food or livestock feed in the back of pickup trucks, even under canopies. Canopies are not bear-resistant.
- Locate compost heaps, livestock, beehives, and other bear food sources away from forests, thickets and natural pathways used by bears. Dig in new compost material to lessen its attraction.

✚ Bears and Crops – what farmers can do:

- **Install electric fencing around your crops.** This is only effective however, if you fence the area **before you have "problem" bears.** Chronic "problem" bears have been known to break through electric fences (see under Orchards).
- Use noise to help keep bears away. Dogs, air horns and acoustic devices such as propane operated scare guns can be operated within the guidelines set by the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands (<http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/ki/proppcan/>).
- Develop a network with your neighbours to help keep each other informed about bears in your area.

✚ Bears and Bees – what beekeepers can do:

- Locate your bee yards in open areas, away from forests and bear travel routes.
- Install an electric fence around your bee yard **before you have bear problems.** Sometimes food-conditioned bears will go right through electric fences.
- Strap your beehives together and put them on elevated platforms out of bear reach. Use metal posts instead of wood to support the platform. Bears can climb wooden posts.

✚ Orchards & vineyards – what growers can do:

- The best way to keep bears off your properties is to enclose them with **electric fencing.** Electric fencing only works, however, if it is operating before bears become a problem. Bears will go right through electric fencing once they are food-conditioned and know that food is available. Electric fences must be 4 feet high with a quick pulse. If the pulse is too slow bears can learn to move through between pulses. Use metal not wooden posts as bears can climb wood. Electric fencing is cost effective and relatively easy to install.
- For information contact **R & S Powerfence, 250-492-7090, www.powerfence.ca**
- Thin the bush on your property or create a break in natural bear pathways that lead to your house.
- Picking ripe and excess fruit and removing windfall on a regular basis will discourage bears from seeking food. Store picked fruit securely behind closed doors.
- If you have bear problems and do not use your fruit trees, consider removing them.

✚ Manage your garbage

- Keep garbage containers indoors - inside a locked shed, garage, or basement until pick-up day.
- Dispose of garbage regularly - don't stockpile it or it will begin to smell and attract bears.
- Never leave fish parts, meat bones, or other meat by-products where a bear's sensitive nose can find them - keep them in your freezer until you can dispose of them properly.
- Spray garbage cans and dumpsters regularly with disinfectants to reduce odours.

✚ DON'T FEED BEARS

- Over 90% of bear/human conflicts result from bears being conditioned to associate food with humans. This can happen with just 1 handout!

Bear Encounters

- ✚ Do everything you can to avoid an encounter with any bear. Prevention is the best advice.
- ✚ If you are working bear country, always make your presence known and keep small children near you at all times.
- ✚ Most experts recommend carrying pepper spray when working or recreating in areas frequented by bears.

Should you come in close contact with a bear, here are some tips:

- ✚ Stop, remain calm, and assess the situation.
- ✚ Move away quietly if bear seems to be unaware of you.
- ✚ If a bear walks toward you, stand up, waving your hands above your head and talk to the bear in a low voice.
- ✚ If you cannot safely move away from the bear or the bear continues toward you, scare it away by clapping your hands, stomping your feet yelling, and staring the animal in the eyes.
- ✚ **Don't run from the bear**
- ✚ Climbing a tree is generally not recommended as an escape from an aggressive black bear, as black bears are adept climbers and may follow you up a tree.

Response to Conflicts with Bears

The Conservation Officer Service will respond to conflicts that pose a public safety or conservation concern. To report problem wildlife call 1-877-952-7277 (RAPP).

The focus of the BC Ministry of Environment is conflict prevention and the Ministry promotes shared stewardship with industry, Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, and others to reduce future bear-human conflict. There are, however, alternatives for dealing with problem bears directly, when a bear threatens your workers or crop.

- ✚ Farmers can use existing hunting and trapping seasons to control bears. Licenses in BC cost \$32.00 and a bear tag is an extra \$20.00. It is important to note that sows with cubs cannot be shot with this hunting license.
- ✚ If there is a hunting season open for bear at the time and in the location of the occurrence, hunters from the local Rod and Gun Club may be able to assist (please refer to current Hunting & Trapping Synopsis at <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/wild/synopsis.htm>).
- ✚ Farmers must ensure that they comply with all Federal, Provincial and Municipal regulations surrounding hunting, trapping and the discharge of firearms in their area.
- ✚ Outside of hunting seasons, bears may be shot with a Sundry Permit. Apply for a Sundry Permit under the Wildlife Act by calling 1-866-433-7272. Application forms for a Sundry Permit can be obtained on-line at <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/pasb>. The fee for a Sundry Permit is \$55.00 and processing time is from 1 day to 2 weeks (depending on the urgency of the situation).
- ✚ A person may kill a black bear or grizzly bear on their property without a permit if it is a menace to a person, domestic animals (livestock) or birds (Section 26(2) of the *Wildlife Act*).
- ✚ Persons must report the killing or wounding of any wildlife. Failing to report the killing or wounding of any wildlife whether it is for protection of life or property is an offence under Section 75 of the *Wildlife Act*.
- ✚ Persons must comply with all Municipal, Provincial and Federal laws surrounding the use and discharge of firearms or the setting of traps.
- ✚ Persons are liable for any wildlife that is wounded or injured as a result of them exercising their rights under Section 26(2) and they are legally responsible for any misuse of firearms.

Bear Attacks

Bear attacks are extremely rare. However, if you are attacked by a bear:

- ✚ **Black Bear**
 - **Fight back aggressively** using your hands, feet, legs, and any object you can reach.
 - Pepper spray the bear's eyes or face.
 - If the attack continues, lie on your stomach with your legs spread slightly apart and your hands locked behind your head. Try to stay in this position.
 - Don't struggle or cry out – lay still. A bear will stop attacking when it thinks you are no longer a threat.
- ✚ **Grizzly Bear**
 - **Don't fight back**
 - Lie on your stomach with your legs spread slightly apart and your hands locked behind your head. Try to stay in this position.
 - Don't struggle or cry out – lay still. A bear will stop attacking when it thinks you are no longer a threat.

Further Information

BC Ministry of Environment, Conservation Officer Service, Wildlife-Human Interactions, Bears.
(http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/cos/info/wildlife_human_interaction/docs/bears.html)

Scott E. Hygnstrom, Black Bears, Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage
(http://wildlifedamage.unl.edu/handbook/handbook/carnivor/ca_c5.pdf)

Staying Safe in Bear Country Video/DVD Series. Safety in Bear Country Society. (<https://www.distributionaccess.com>)

Russell Link, *Living with Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest*. 2004, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, USA.
pp. 28-36

Updated: July 2008.



How to Respond When Encountering a Bear

Please call 1-877-952-7277 (RAPP) or #7277 on the TELUS Mobility Network to report wildlife that threatens public safety.

