

DEP PUBLIC OUTREACH CAMPAIGN OFFERS SAFETY TIPS AS BEARS EMERGE FROM WINTER DENS

RESIDENTS URGED TO PROPERLY SECURE TRASH AND TAKE OTHER STEPS TO REDUCE RISK OF ENCOUNTERS

(23/P20) TRENTON – The Department of Environmental Protection is reminding residents and outdoor enthusiasts to take steps to reduce the potential for encounters with black bears as the animals emerge from winter dens. The DEP is also expanding its multimedia [“Know the Bear Facts”](#) outreach campaign to enhance information on ways for property owners and outdoor enthusiasts to stay safe throughout the year.



“People can reduce the likelihood of attracting bears if they diligently bear-proof their property by removing or properly securing any potential food sources,” **DEP Fish & Wildlife Assistant Commissioner David Golden** said. “It is also critically important for people to *never* feed black bears. Feeding bears is dangerous, illegal and may result in bears becoming aggressive.”

“We are launching our educational outreach campaign just before the start of spring, when bears are very active. People who live in or visit areas of the state where bears are out and about should be alert to their presence and take steps to avoid interactions with them,” **said DEP Fish & Wildlife Black Bear Outreach Coordinator Michelle Smith**. “Properly secure your garbage to prevent bears from looking at your property as a food source and become familiar with ways to avoid encounters and how to react if an encounter occurs.”

NJDEP’s Fish & Wildlife will implement its multimedia black bear safety outreach campaign that includes messages in English and Spanish providing bear safety tips and public service announcements on social media, TV streaming services, radio broadcasts, the program’s bear safety webpage and email blasts. The information will be in the form of animated GIFs, short video clips and graphics.

The statewide marketing campaign will build upon last year’s successful black bear outreach initiative, which drew more than 59,000 new users to Fish & Wildlife’s bear safety website and garnered more than 18 million impressions. It will also be expanded to run from March 15 to November 15, 2023, increasing the timeframe of the campaign to eight months compared to four months last year and coinciding with peak periods of bear activity.

The DEP continues to advance non-lethal management methods for black bears and significantly increase its public education and outreach efforts, including the development and implementation of the statewide multimedia outreach campaign.

In addition to the outreach campaign, two DEP programs, Fish & Wildlife and Sustainable Waste Management, have brought on additional staff to further educate the public about black bears in New Jersey and how to avoid conflicts with them. These staff will provide guidance to counties and municipalities on reducing human-bear interactions and developing a comprehensive program that addresses waste management and ways to reduce it as a potential food source for bears.



“The Division of Sustainable Waste Management looks forward to working with Fish & Wildlife staff on this important issue and helping New Jersey residents learn ways to minimize conflicts with black bears by securing bear-resistant waste containers and educating residents on best practices for managing waste, in coordination with local government partners,” **said Division of Sustainable Waste Management Director Janine MacGregor.**

Reducing the presence of trash in unsecured waste containers and other food sources, such as pet food, bird seed or even small livestock, is essential because bears will learn to associate food with people and their homes and begin to forage in neighborhoods for food. These nuisance bears can cause property damage, approach humans for food and become dangerous. **Intentionally feeding bears is illegal in New Jersey and carries a fine of up to \$1,000.**

Most of New Jersey's black bears live in the northwest portion of the state, particularly Morris, Sussex, Warren and northern Passaic counties, and portions of Hunterdon, Somerset, and Bergen counties. However, black bears have been sighted in all of New Jersey's 21 counties.

The next phase of the outreach campaign, focusing on outdoor recreationists in bear country, will be featured in the summer months starting in June.

The DEP offers the following tips for property owners to minimize conflicts with bears:

- Secure trash and eliminate obvious sources of food such as pet food bowls, easy-to-reach bird feeders, or food residue left on barbecue grills.

- Use certified bear-resistant garbage containers if possible. Otherwise, store all garbage in containers with tight-fitting lids and place them along the inside walls of your garage, or in the basement, a sturdy shed or other secure area.
- Wash garbage containers frequently with a disinfectant solution to remove odors. Put out garbage on collection day, not the night before.
- Avoid feeding birds when bears are active. If you choose to feed birds, do so during daylight hours only and bring feeders indoors at night. Suspend birdfeeders from a free-hanging wire, making sure they are at least 10 feet off the ground. Clean up spilled seeds and shells daily.
- Immediately remove all uneaten food and food bowls used by pets fed outdoors.
- Clean outdoor grills and utensils to remove food and grease residue. Store grills securely.
- Do not place meat, dairy or any sweet foods in compost piles.
- Remove fruit or nuts that fall from trees in your yard.
- Properly install electric fencing as an effective way to protect crops, beehives and livestock.

If you encounter a black bear in your neighborhood or outdoors while hiking or camping, follow these safety tips:

- **Remain calm. Never run from a bear, as this may trigger its predatory instinct. Instead, slowly back away. Avoid direct eye contact, which may be perceived by a bear as a challenge. Make sure the bear has an escape route.**
- To scare the bear away, make loud noises by yelling, using a whistle, banging pots and pans, or blowing an air horn. Make yourself look as big as possible by waving your arms. If you are with someone else, stand close together with your arms raised above your head.
- Make bears aware of your presence by speaking in an assertive voice, singing, clapping your hands, or making other noises. If hiking through bear country, always make your presence known through loud talking or clapping of hands.
- If a bear utters a series of huffs, makes popping jaw sounds by snapping its jaws or swats the ground, these are warning signs that you are too close. Slowly back away and avoid direct eye contact. **Do not run.**
- If a bear stands on its hind legs or moves closer, it may be trying to get a better view or detect scents in the air. This is usually a non-threatening behavior.
- Black bears will sometimes "bluff charge" when cornered, threatened, or attempting to steal food. Stand your ground, avoid direct eye contact, slowly back away and do not run.
- If the bear does not leave, move to a secure area, such as a vehicle or a building.
- Families who live in areas frequented by black bears should have a "Bear Plan" in place for children, with an escape route and planned use of whistles and air horns.
- Black bear attacks are extremely rare. **If a black bear does attack, fight back.**

Report black bear damage or aggressive bears to your local police department or to Fish & Wildlife by calling 1-(877) WARN DEP (1-877-927-6337).

For more information about black bears in New Jersey, visit dep.nj.gov/njfw/bears/.

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