

Things to “bear” in mind

ROG 16-61 3/2020

Black bears (*Ursus americanus*) are common in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and on the Stanislaus National Forest. Since bears have been sighted on all the forest’s ranger districts, it’s important that you know what to do if you encounter a bear.

Wild black bears naturally avoid humans, but if bears gain access to human food or trash, they rapidly learn to associate humans with food. This is a problem that can cause them to abandon their normal foraging behaviors in favor of seeking human foods. They often lose caution around people and loiter near camps, damaging packs, tents, and cars in order to get food. Bears that become habituated to human food may become aggressive, threatening and even harming people. These bears often end up being killed.

Never approach a bear! If you encounter a bear, act immediately. Yell, clap your hands or bang pots together. Gather pets and children. If there is more than one person in your group, stand together to create a larger figure. Do not surround the bear. Be especially cautious if you see cubs, because the mother may act aggressively to defend them. When hiking, keep pets leashed. Use your voice to



avoid surprising bears. For example, talk or sing while hiking through thick brush. Avoid listening to music with headphones when hiking or biking in bear country. Bicycle slowly, especially around corners and where visibility is limited. Never attempt to retrieve anything from a bear. Report any incidents, like sightings or obtaining food, to the nearest Forest Service Office.



Use wildlife-resistant canisters. For most visitors, the most simple and effective storage method is wildlife-resistant canisters. Wildlife-resistant panniers or coolers with locks can be effective for pack stock users. While wildlife-resistant canisters are strongly encouraged but not required on the Stanislaus National Forest, visitors may be cited under sanitation regulations if animals break into their food and cause trash to be strewn about. If you choose to not use one, you will contribute to human-bear conflicts, which bears usually lose. Check with the ranger district where you plan to visit and ask if they have wildlife-resistant canisters available for rent. Please note that Yosemite National Park requires campers to use specific types of wildlife-resistant canisters.

Storing food. Store food properly. Safe food storage is vital to a successful trip into bear country.

- Never leave food unattended, day or night. Keep all food stored except at meals. Bears may enter campsites even if people are present.
- If bears do find your food and make a mess, you must comply with sanitation regulations and clean it up.
- **Never** store food in your tent or sleeping area.
- For your own protection, store your food away from your campsite, but close enough to hear if a bear is attempting to get at food.



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The forest is installing wildlife-resistant food lockers in designated campgrounds and trail-heads. If they are already installed at your location, we strongly encourage you to use them. If there are no food storage lockers provided, put all food and supplies out of sight in a hard-sided vehicle with the windows up. Where possible, store items in the car’s trunk.

Storing food in backcountry or wilderness

In backcountry or wilderness areas, bear-resistant canisters are the most effective way to store food. They are also the most convenient and allow the visitor to camp in many more sites, including where large trees are not present.

If you don’t have a bear-resistant canister, a simple food hang, while less effective, is better than not securing your food at all. Due to the number of bear encounters in Yosemite National Park, simple food hangs have become completely ineffective and wildlife-resistant canisters are required when camping in their wilderness areas. Before your trip, purchase a sturdy waterproof stuff sack and 40 to 50 feet of alpine cord. At your campsite, find a live tree with a sturdy branch that is at least 20 feet above ground and extends away from the trunk at least 10 feet. Tie a rock to one end of the alpine cord and toss it over the branch, placing the rope at least 10 feet out from trunk. Lower the rock and remove it, replacing it with your food sack. Hoist it up so it is at least 12 feet above ground and 8 feet down from branch. Tie off with a sturdy knot on a separate tree.

Being bear-aware will help you have a safe and enjoyable camping adventure. It will also help bears to stay wild and not gain a taste for human food.

Learn more about bears and food storage at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/visit/know-before-you-go/bears>, or visit <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Keep-Me-Wild>.



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