

# Actsafes Safety Bulletin #31a

## BRITISH COLUMBIA WILDLIFE



Workers who may encounter bears, cougars or wolves in the course of their work must receive related education and safety training. The following topics should be included in an organization's health and safety program.

- Information about bears, cougars and wolves.
- How to avoid bears, cougars and wolves.
- Means to control bears, cougars and wolves.
- How to survive bear, cougar and wolf attacks.

### BEARS

More and more habitat is being shared by humans and black bears. Often times, by following the simple steps below, you may be able to avoid unpleasant bear conflicts.

- Never approach or feed a bear, or any other wild animal for that matter. The feeding of any wildlife, including birds, may inadvertently attract bears.
- Spray or pour ammonia in and around garbage cans, and avoid placing aromatic food wastes, such as bacon grease or spoiled foods, in garbage cans.
- Make plenty of noise to avoid a surprise encounter when in bear habitat.
- Carry bear pepper spray and know how to use it.
- Use bear-proof food containers.
- Store food securely, out of the open.
- Keep a clean set!

### HOW TO TELL A GRIZZLY BEAR AND BLACK BEAR APART:

When trying to distinguish between a grizzly bear and a black bear, don't just focus on colour or size. A black bear can be brown and large, while a grizzly bear can be quite dark and small. Instead, look for these distinguishing features:

**Shoulder hump:** Grizzly bears have a large hump of muscle across the shoulders. This muscle powers their forelegs to dig out food sources such as roots, ground squirrels, marmots and bulbs. Their long, curved claws (5 – 10 cm) function as digging tools. Black bears have no hump, nor the same digging ability (claw length: 3 – 4 cm).

**Profile of the face:** Grizzly bears have a large, rounded head with a dish-shaped or concave profile. The profile of a black bear's face is straight or 'roman'.

### IF YOU ENCOUNTER A BEAR

- **If spotted from a distance**, make a wide detour or leave the area immediately.
- **If you are at close range**, remain calm and keep the bear in view. Avoid direct eye contact. Move away without running.

### IF THE BEAR APPROACHES

- If the bear is standing up, it is usually trying to identify you. Talk softly so it knows what you are. If it is snapping its jaws, lowering its head, flattening its ears, growling or making 'woofing' signs, it is displaying aggression.



- Do not run unless you are very close to a secure place. Move away, keeping the bear in view. Avoid direct eye contact. Dropping your pack or an object may distract it to give you more time. If it is a Grizzly, consider climbing a tree.

### **IF THE BEAR ATTACKS**

Your response depends on the species and whether the bear is being defensive or offensive. Bears sometimes bluff their way out of a confrontation by charging then turning away at the last moment. Generally, don't do anything to threaten or further arouse the bear. While fighting back usually increases the intensity of an attack, it may cause the bear to leave.

**EACH INCIDENT IS UNIQUE AND THE FOLLOWING ARE OFFERED ONLY AS GUIDELINES TO DEAL WITH AN UNPREDICTABLE ANIMAL AND COMPLEX SITUATIONS:**

#### **IF A BEAR ATTACKS AS A RESULT OF BEING SURPRISED (DEFENSIVE ATTACK)**

- Do nothing to threaten or further arouse the bear.
- If it's a Grizzly Bear, play dead. Assume the 'cannonball position' with hands clasped behind neck and face buried in knees. Do not move until the bear leaves the area. Such attacks seldom last beyond a few minutes.
- If it's a Black Bear, do not play dead. Try to retreat from the attack.

#### **IF A BEAR ATTACKS OFFENSIVELY (IE. STALKING)**

- Do not play dead. Try to escape to a secure place (car or building). If it's a Grizzly Bear, try to climb a tree. If you have no other option, try to intimidate the bear with deterrents or weapons such as tree branches or rocks.

#### **BEAR ATTACKING YOU FOR FOOD**

- Abandon the food. Leave the area.
- Do not deal with a problem bear unless it is an emergency.

#### **COUGARS**

- Stay in groups of two or more. Make enough noise to prevent surprising a cougar.
- Watch for cougar tracks and signs. Cougars cover unconsumed portions of their kills with soil and leaf litter. Avoid these food caches.
- If you stumble upon cougar kittens, do not approach or attempt to pick them up. Leave the area immediately, as a female will defend her young.

#### **IF YOU SEE A COUGAR**

- Never approach a cougar. Although cougars normally avoid confrontation, they are unpredictable. Cougars feeding on a kill may be dangerous.
- Always give a cougar an avenue of escape.
- Stay calm. Talk to the cougar in a confident voice.
- Pick all children up off the ground immediately. Children frighten easily and their rapid movements may provoke an attack.
- Do not run. Try to back away from the cougar slowly. Sudden movement or flight may trigger an instinctive attack.
- Do not turn your back on the cougar. Face the cougar and remain upright.
- Do all you can to make yourself appear larger. Don't crouch down or try to hide. Pick up sticks or branches and wave them about.



### **IF A COUGAR BEHAVES AGGRESSIVELY**

- Arm yourself with a large stick, throw rocks, speak loudly and firmly. Convince the cougar that you are a threat not prey.
- If a cougar attacks, fight back! Many people have survived cougar attacks by fighting back with anything, including rocks, sticks, bare fists, and fishing poles.

### **WOLVES**

If a wolf appears and acts unafraid or aggressive, take the following action as soon as you notice the animal:

- Do not allow the wolf to approach any closer than 100 metres.
- Raise your arms and wave them in the air to make yourself appear larger.
- When in a group, act in unison to send a clear message to the wolves they are not welcome.
- Back away slowly, do not turn your back on the wolf.
- Make noise, throw sticks, rocks and sand at the wolf.
- Store food securely where wolves will not be able to reach it.

Remember, you are a guest in this environment. This is home to the animals that live here. If you encounter any animal that is displaying habituated behaviour (not afraid of people) please report sighting and details to Parks staff.

You can report wildlife related incidents to Wildlife Conservation Officers at the following numbers:

**Lower Mainland:** 1-800-663-9453

**North Vancouver and West Vancouver:** 604-990-2327

**Coquitlam:** 604-933-6317

**Outside of the Lower Mainland:** 1-877-953-7277

**For more information on bears, cougars and wolves, please visit the following links:**

<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/misc/bears/bearsaf.html>

<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/documents/cougfs.htm>

<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/misc/wolves/wolfsaf.html>