

Proper food storage can keep bears at bay



Bears in Tahoe sometimes like to forage for people food. Photo/Janice Eastburn

With the summer season approaching, agencies are asking residents and visitors to practice proper food storage and trash disposal when living in or visiting bear country.

There are an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 American black bears living in the Sierra Nevada.

Spring is the time when bears emerge from their winter dens in search of food. They are attracted to anything edible or scented. Once they get access to human food and garbage, bears lose their fear of humans and can cause property damage and threaten public safety.

Back-to-back dry seasons in the Lake Tahoe Basin mean bears are likely to seek out trash. Residents and visitors can help keep bears wild and reduce potential conflicts between bears and humans by properly storing food and garbage.

Follow these tips to prevent a bear encounter:

- Purchase, store all trash in, and properly close bear-resistant garbage containers.

- Freeze strong smelling left overs, such as fish, until trash day to reduce the smell.
- Wait to put trash out until the morning of collection day.
- Keep garbage cans clean and deodorize them with bleach or ammonia.
- Don't leave trash, groceries, or animal feed in your car.
- Keep barbecue grills clean and stored in a garage or shed when not in use.
- Only provide bird feeders from November through March.
- Don't leave any scented non-food products outside (or in your car), such as suntan lotion, lip balm, insect repellent, toothpaste, soap or candles.
- Keep doors and windows closed and locked when the home is unoccupied.
- Consider installing motion-detector alarms, electric fencing or motion activated sprinklers.
- Harvest fruit off trees as soon as it is ripe, and promptly collect all fruit that falls.
- Securely block access to potential hibernation sites, such as crawl spaces under decks and buildings.
- Never feed wildlife.

Tips for safe-guarding campsites against a bear encounter:

- Always store food (including pet food), drinks, toiletries, coolers, cleaned grills, cleaned dishes, cleaning products, and all other scented items as soon as possible after use in the bear-resistant containers (storage lockers) provided at your campsite.

- Clean the barbecue grill after each use and store properly.
- Always place trash in bear-resistant dumpsters in campground or in bear-resistant containers at your campsite and close and lock after each use.
- Never leave scented items unattended in your campsite, tent, or car.
- Never leave trash at your campsite.
- Never feed wildlife.

To report bear conflicts in California, call (916) 445.0380. To report bear conflicts in Nevada, contact the Nevada Department of Wildlife at (775) 688.2327. If the issue is an immediate threat, call 911.

Agencies involved in this effort include the U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, California State Parks, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Nevada Department of Wildlife, and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.