

Alaska is Bear Country

In most cases, bears are not a threat, but they do deserve your respect and attention. When traveling in bear country, keep alert and enjoy the opportunity to see these magnificent animals in their natural habitat.

- Avoid surprising bears at close distance; look for signs of bears and make plenty of noise.
- Never approach or feed a bear, or any other wildlife.
- Avoid crowding bears; respect their "personal space."
- Avoid attracting bears through improper handling of food or garbage.
- Plan ahead, stay calm, identify yourself, don't run.

Bears Don't Like Surprises

If you are hiking through bear country, make your presence known-especially where the terrain or vegetation makes it hard to see.

- Make noise, sing, talk loudly or tie a bell to your pack. Your voice will help a bear to identify you as human.
- If possible, travel with a group. Groups are noisier and easier for bears to detect.
- Avoid thick brush. If you can't, try to walk with the wind at your back so your scent will warn bears of your presence.

Contrary to popular belief, bears can see almost as well as people, but trust their noses much more than their eyes or ears. Always let bears know you are there.

- Avoid wearing scented cosmetics and hair products.

Don't Crowd Bears

Give bears plenty of room. Some bears are more tolerant than others, but every bear has a "personal space"- the distance within which a bear feels threatened. If you stray within that zone, a bear may react aggressively.

When photographing bears, use long lenses; getting close for a great shot could put you inside the danger zone.

- Overturned rocks or broken-up, rotten logs can be a sign that a bear has been foraging for grubs or insects.
- Claw marks on trees, scats, tracks in the dirt or snow, berries on the ground, plant root diggings, or fur on the bark of trees are all signs that a bear has been in the area.
- Keep dogs on a leash and under control. Dogs may fight with bears and lead them back to you.
- If a bear approaches while you are fishing, stop fishing. If you have a fish on your line, don't let it splash. If that's not possible, cut your line. If a bear learns it can obtain fish just by approaching fishermen, it will return for more.

What to do if you have a close encounter with a bear

If you see a bear, avoid it if you can. Give the bear every opportunity to avoid you. If you do encounter a bear at close distance, remain calm. **Attacks are rare.** Chances are, you are not in danger. Most bears are interested only in protecting food, cubs or their "personal space." Once the threat is removed, they will move on. Remember the following:

Identify Yourself Let the bear know you are human.

- Talk to the bear in a normal voice.

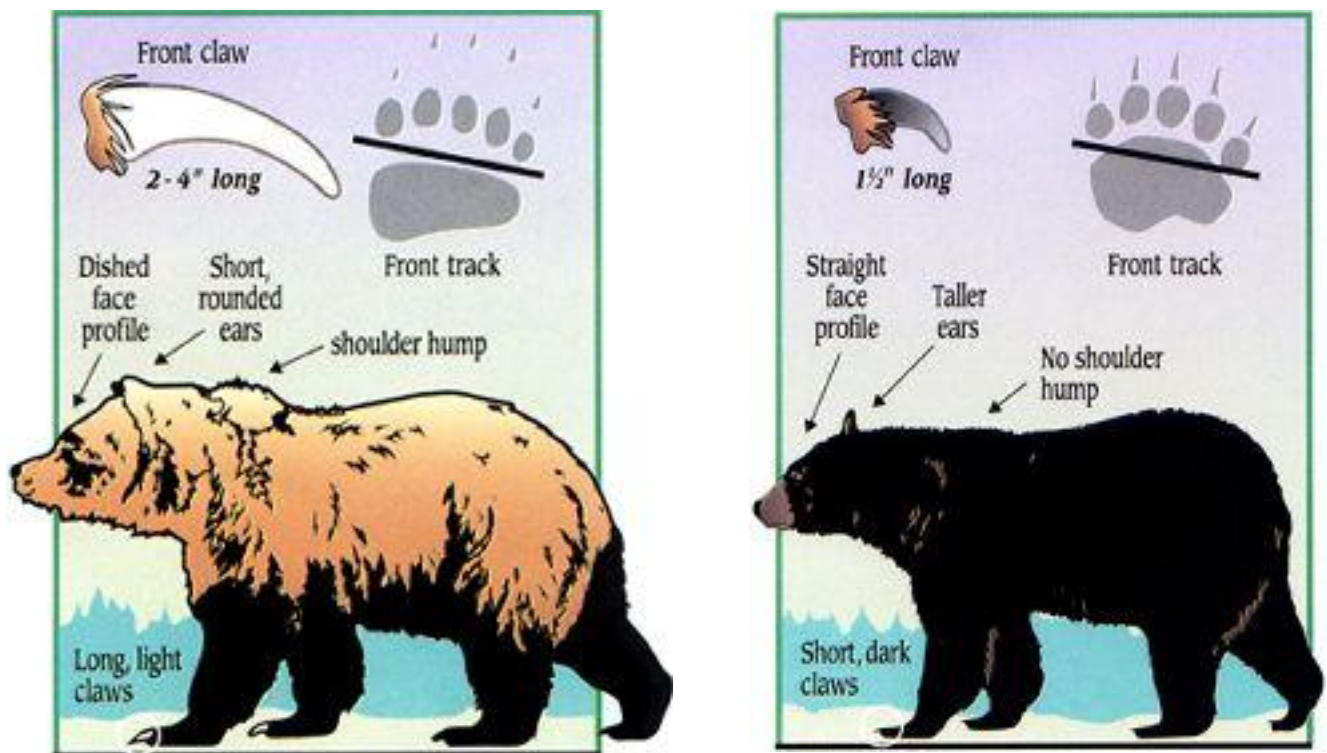
- Wave your arms.
- Help the bear recognize you. If a bear cannot tell what you are, it may come closer or stand on its hind legs to get a better look or smell. A standing bear is usually curious, not threatening.
- You may try to back away slowly diagonally, but if the bear follows, stop and hold your ground.

Don't Run You can't outrun a bear. They have been clocked at speeds up to 35 mph, and like dogs, they will chase fleeing animals. Bears often make bluff charges, sometimes to within 10 feet of their adversary, without making contact.

- Continue waving your arms and talking to the bear.
- If the bear gets too close, raise your voice and be more aggressive.
- Bang pots and pans. Use noisemakers.
- Never imitate bear sounds or make a high-pitched squeal.

Surrender If a brown bear actually touches you, fall to the ground and play dead.

- Lie flat on your stomach, or curl up in a ball with your hands behind your neck. Typically a brown bear will break off its attack once it feels the threat has been eliminated.
- Remain motionless for as long as possible. If you move, a brown bear may return and renew its attack and you must again play dead.
- If you are attacked by a black bear, fight back vigorously.



Protection

Firearms should never be used as an alternative to common-sense approaches to bear encounters. If you are inexperienced with a firearm in emergency situations, you are more likely to be injured by a gun than a bear. It is illegal to carry firearms in some of Alaska's national parks, so check before you go.

A .300-Magnum rifle or a 12-gauge shotgun with rifled slugs are appropriate weapons if you have to shoot a bear. Heavy handguns such as a .44-Magnum may be inadequate in emergency situations, especially in untrained hands.

Alaska State law allows a bear to be shot in self-defense if you did not provoke the attack and if there is no alternative, but the hide and skull must be salvaged and turned over to the authorities.

Defensive aerosol sprays which contain capsicum (red pepper extract) have been used with some success for protection against bears. These sprays may be effective at a range of 6-8 yards. If discharged upwind or in a vehicle, they can disable the user. Take appropriate precautions. If you carry a spray can, keep it handy and know how to use it.

Note: It has been determined that the odor from aerosol bear sprays containing capsicum actually attract bears similar to the reaction of cats to catnip. **NEVER** spray any of your gear or the area around your campsite with this material.

For additional information about traveling in bear country, please contact one of the following agencies:

Alaska Department of Fish & Game (907) 465-4190

Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Divisions of Forestry and Parks and Outdoor Recreation (907) 269-8700

Alaska Department of Public Safety, Division of Fish & Wildlife Protection (907) 269-5511

Alaska Natural History Association (866) AK-PARKS

U.S. Bureau of Land Management National Park Service (202) 208-3100

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (800) 344-WILD

U.S. Forest Service (202) 205-8333