

## ***DOW Insider***

### **APRIL MEANS BEARS EMERGE FROM HIBERNATION**

Mid-April, 2 a.m. -- A woman hears a loud noise and looks out the window to see a black bear sniffing around her trash can. She secured the lid on the can with a bungee cord. She watches as the bear lifts the can and throws it. The lid flies off and the bear has found something to eat.

It's that time of year when Colorado's bears emerge from hibernation. Male bears come out first. Depending on the weather and elevation, they start coming out in early to mid-April. If they don't find green grass or new plant growth to eat, they might go back into the den. Females with cubs come out later, but they will all be out by May.

Every year, the Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW) receives phone calls from residents concerned about bears visiting their property. It ran through my yard! It knocked over my trash! It was on my deck! The stories usually end with a question, "What should I do about it?"

In communities located in bear country, residents often have conflicting views about what to do. Most people say, "learn to live with them," but some want bears moved "back where they belong."

A hundred years ago, there were places in Colorado where bears could live without coming in contact with people, but today there are few places left in bear habitat where people haven't built subdivisions, campgrounds, or summer homes.

Given a choice, bears would just as soon avoid people, but there are not many far-away places to move bears "back where they belong" anymore. Bears are territorial. Sometimes, bears return to where they were captured within days.

As a result, the one of the best options left today is for people to take precautions and learn to co-exist with bears, and other wildlife.

To keep bears out of trash cans, garages and homes, people should reduce the chance that bears find easy food by removing attractants. Once a bear finds food in a location, it becomes programmed to continue looking for food in similar places. If that location is near people, the desire for easy food will replace its fear of humans.

In all likelihood, the bear that was determined to get inside the trash can found food in a similar trash can before. Leaving garbage out overnight - even one time - is a tempting invitation to bears. A mother bear that eats trash teaches her offspring to do the same.

On the other hand, if a bear wanders through a community and does not find anything to eat, it will keep moving and go back out of town looking for natural foods such as seeds, insects, edible plants, nuts, or berries.

Changing human behavior and removing common attractants discourages bear visits that put both humans and bears at risk.

The DOW encourages residents to make property "bear-resistant" by cleaning or removing any items a bear might consider potential food sources.

- Keep garbage in airtight containers inside a garage or storage area.
- Clean trash cans with ammonia to reduce odors that attract bears.
- Place garbage for pickup outside just before collection and not the night before.
- Use a bear-proof can or dumpster - if not available, ask your trash-removal company for options.
- Take down bird feeders when bears are active. If a bear finds a birdfeeder, it will look around the neighborhood for other easy food within reach.
- Do not leave pet food or dishes outdoors at night. Store pet food inside in airtight containers.
- Clean outdoor grills after each use. The smell of grease can attract bears, even when no food is present.
- Never intentionally feed bears to attract them for viewing. It is illegal to feed bears in Colorado.

Remember, "A fed bear is a dead bear." By making food available to a bear, even a single time, teaches the bear to associate humans with food. Once a bear learns this association, it can become a returning nuisance and wildlife officers must destroy the bear.

An ounce of prevention is truly worth 200 pounds of cure.

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The Colorado Division of Wildlife is the state agency responsible for managing wildlife and wildlife habitat, as well as providing wildlife related recreation and maintaining a balance between human activities and wildlife. Funding for the Division of Wildlife comes from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and the habitat fees collected in conjunction with those sales. The Division does not receive tax dollars from the Colorado general fund.

For more information about Division of Wildlife go to: <http://wildlife.state.co.us>.