

Excerpts from the section on Bear Behavior in the Tongass National Forest Employee's Guide
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Bears are inquisitive, intelligent and opportunistic animals. They are also powerful and can be dangerous. Forest Service work areas often contain sign of bear and sightings are common. Although most encounters between employees and bears are positive, careful attention is needed to prevent problems.

Prevent negative encounters with bears by following two primary rules:

1. **NO Food** – Bears should never be given access to human food or garbage. Camps should be kept clean, food and garbage must be placed in bear resistant containers or be suspended from trees or cables with the bottoms of containers at least 12 feet above the ground.
2. **NO Surprises** – Always give bears ample warning of your approach. Although bears most commonly flee, they sometimes exhibit subtle or overt aggression. Consistently make noise while working or hiking. Situate camps away from recent bear sign such as trails, scats, tree scrapes or food sources. When fresh bear sign is discovered in work areas, proceed slowly and loudly, keeping the group together and vigilant.

Black bears and grizzly (brown) bears share many behavioral traits. Aggressive responses by bears are rare and primarily occur when they are surprised by perceived threats within their personal space, especially female brown bears defending their cubs. Bears most commonly flee from threats, especially black bears, although any bear can be aggressive. Bears that don't immediately flee may show signs of low level stress without charging including lowering of head, salivation (especially in brown bears), staring at and orienting their body toward the source of concern. Highly stressed bears may vocalize, snap jaws, swat vegetation, or even charge.

Precautions to take in bear habitat as well as reactions to aggressive bear encounters follow similar rules for both species. Bears may flee humans, or ignore them, and may even sometimes approach people. Approaches by bears fall into one of two classes important to distinguish:

1. **Non-defensive** approaches are often by curious young bears seeking food or testing dominance, although any bear can approach for these reasons. Curiosity often drives a bear to investigate camps and residences. In rare cases these approaches can turn predatory if the bear is not deterred. Non-defensive bears often approach people or human structures from a distance in a calm manner.
2. **Defensive approaches, or charges** are by bears defending their food, cubs or mate. Most are the result of a surprise close encounter, though crowding a bear that seems unconcerned can also trigger a defensive charge. Most commonly they are by female brown bears defending cubs from a threat within their personal space. They often behave nervous and agitated and may huff, pop their jaws, swat the ground and make runs at whatever triggered their fear.

React similarly to any bear approaching you:

1. **Avoid confrontations** with bears whenever possible. If a distant bear is headed your way, try to move away from its travel path, or leave a feeding site such as a fishing hole or berry patch that it may want to access. If it follows and focuses attention on you, stop and stand your ground.

2. **Stop and Stand your ground** whenever a bear is approaching you during a close interaction, even if it is charging. Never run or the bear may start to chase. Even slowly retreating can embolden a bear to pursue you. Watch the bear, assess its motives. Often it will change its mind and move away once you stand close to your partner, hold your ground and talk to the bear, identifying yourself as human. Keep any deterrent (e.g. bear spray) handy.
3. **If the bear stops the approach/charge, try moving away slowly while the bear is stationary** This can especially be effective with a defensive bear. Take a few steps away at an angle. If the bear stays, take a few more, very slowly, while looking and talking to the bear. When you are some distance away, move away more quickly, but if you are moving away and the bear follows you, charges again or seems to be more stressed than when you weren't moving, stop again.
4. **If you are having a prolonged interaction with a bear**, the bear is probably unsure what to do and your behavior can make the difference in the outcome. Standing your ground and doing very little other than talking calmly with deterrent ready is the best overall strategy.
 - a. **To a defensive bear** that is agitated because it considers you a potential threat, standing calmly is not very provocative and may help reassure it so it leaves you alone. Try to convey that it has nothing to worry about from you.
 - b. **To a curious or non-defensive bear** that is testing you, you are also being somewhat assertive by not panicking and fleeing. A curious bear will probably leave you alone when it realizes it can't push you around. If the bear continues to push you around, increase your "don't mess with me" response by shouting, staring at the bear, making yourself appear larger, taking a step or two towards the bear or throwing rocks or sticks at the bear.
5. **If charged at close range, stand your ground and use your bear spray.** The effective range of bear spray is very short may not instantly stop a charging bear. Your proficiency in use of spray depends on good training and practice. So does your responsibility of weighing protection of your crew with the risk posed by the bear.
6. **If a surprise encounter with a defensive bear results in contact** (such as a grizzly protecting its cubs), fall to the ground, cover up, and play dead. This is only a last resort if all else fails, and by not moving or making noise the bear will probably leave, thinking the threat has passed. But you should remain down and still until you're sure it's gone. In rare cases, a defensive bear may not stop its attack even if you continue to play dead. If the attack is prolonged and the bear starts treating you as prey by smelling, licking and feeding on you, fight back with whatever you have.
7. **If contact is made by a non-defensive, pushy bear** that calmly approaches and pursues you, or breaks into a tent or building, fight back vigorously, using whatever you have at hand. If you have no deterrent, concentrate your blows on its face and muzzle.

Remember bears are more predictable than most people realize, and prevention measures normally work. Even bears surprised at close range usually flee. Your best defense is preparation and precaution.