

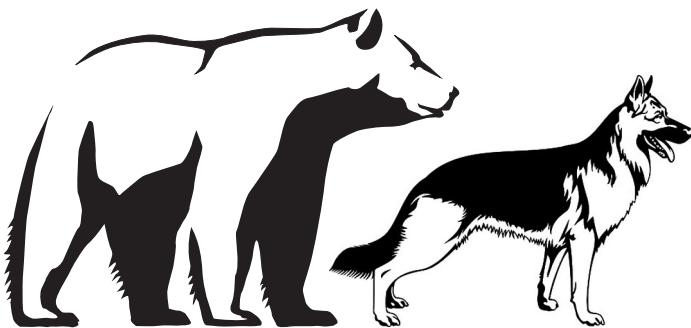
Dogs + Bears = Problems

If you live in or travel to bear country and own a dog, sooner or later your dog may encounter a bear. Understanding why some encounters end peacefully and others end with dogs and people being injured or killed can help keep people, dogs and bears safe.



*Don't force a mother black bear to defend her cubs.
(Photo: Warren Holland; Durango, Colorado)*

Dogs were involved in more than half of the incidents involving people and black bears between 2010 – 2015. Just under half (46%) of those dogs were injured or killed; their human companions did not fare quite as well, with 62% of them being injured. Many of the dogs involved had been off-leash, a situation that can easily result in the dog chasing or cornering a bear and being injured, killed, or turning tail and running back to its owner with an aggravated bear close behind.



Black bears can weigh 300 pounds or more, depending on age, sex and time of year. A popular large dog breed, the German Shepherd, averages only 70 pounds.



Why Bears and Dogs Don't Get Along

Black bears are neither confrontational nor aggressive by nature. As a species, black bears evolved in forested habitats where they learned to respond to danger and avoid trouble by climbing a tree or disappearing into the woods. When those options aren't available, a bear's natural instinct for self-preservation kicks in, and the bear will defend itself, its food, or its cubs.

Dog behavior is more complex; not all dogs bark for the same reasons. Some breeds bark, lunge and bite out of fear; others have an innate drive to bark and chase. Protective breeds may be trying to guard their humans. And some dogs just really love to bark. But to the bear, your dog's motivation doesn't matter. A barking, lunging, snapping or chasing dog is seen as a threat. It's very likely the bear will respond by defending itself.

Bears Will Protect Their Food

Bears will typically defend any food source, particularly something as calorie-rich as pet food, garbage or birdseed. A dog that interrupts a bear's dinner is asking for trouble. A person who comes between a defensive bear and an aggressive dog is putting their life at risk.

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When Dogs Chase Bears

Bears can run faster than an Olympic sprinter for short distances; if you're lucky, the bear will escape from your dog. If you're not lucky, the bear will have to defend itself against your dog. Dog vs. bear seldom ends well for the dog.

If you are very unlucky, the dog will realize it has picked a fight it can't win, turn tail and run back to you. If the bear gives chase, you and the dog become one big problem the bear needs to neutralize so it can feel safe again.



Bears Don't Like To Be Cornered

A black bear's natural instinct is to avoid confrontation. That's why the most common bear sightings consist of the tail end of the bear disappearing into the trees. If you encounter a bear AND your dog is on a leash AND you can keep it from lunging at the bear, the bear will most likely run away. If your dog is not on a leash, you are increasing

the chances that a bear encounter will escalate into a dangerous situation.



Wolves, coyotes, bobcats, eagles and male bears all prey on black bear cubs. To a mother bear, a barking dog is another potentially dangerous predator that means harm; if she cannot quickly or easily get her cubs to safety, she will defend them.

Living With Dogs in Bear Country

- Feed pets indoors, if possible.
- If you must feed pets outside, feed only single portions and remove bowls as soon as your pet is finished.
- Keep your dog on a non-retractable leash even if you're just going to the car.
- Install motion-activated security lights. Check the yard and bang on your door before you let your dog out.
- If you see a bear, bring your dog inside. Don't allow it to bark at or harass the bear, even from inside a fenced yard.
- Pet doors should open into completely enclosed areas; some bears can squeeze through openings as small as nine inches high. Cubs (and other critters you don't want in the house) can fit through even smaller openings.
- If your dog gets into an encounter with a bear, don't try to rescue it. If you can do so from a safe distance, use your bear spray or a high-powered garden hose.

Out Walking Your Dog?

- Keep your dog on a non-retractable leash at all times.
- Carry bear spray and know how to use it.
- Stay alert; music and phones are distracting.
- Avoid walking at dawn, dusk or at night in areas with known bear activity.
- If you see a bear, turn around and leave.
- Don't let your dog bark at, harass, chase, or corner a bear.
- If your dog gets into a fight with a bear, don't try to rescue it. You will get injured. Instead, use your bear spray.

**Making the right choices can keep dogs and people safe and bears wild.
Making the wrong choices can have serious consequences for all. Be BearWise.**

Leashes Save Lives Letting your dog run free in the neighborhood or the woods is usually illegal and always dangerous. A much higher percentage of dogs that get into confrontations with bears are seriously injured or killed when dogs are off leash. The people who try to rescue a dog are also more seriously injured. It may be tempting to let your dog run free, but don't put your dog and yourself at risk. **Please, leash up.**



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

BearWise.org

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