

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Managing Bear Conflicts

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

The Appalachian Trail crosses North Georgia's Blood Mountain Wilderness, home to a historic, stone trail shelter; and the site of considerable weekend visitation. The Wilderness was also the scene of increasing bear-human interactions – something land managers try to avoid for the benefit of all involved.

To turn that trend around, in 2012 the USDA Forest Service, which manages the Wilderness, began requiring the use of bear-resistant food canisters to carry garbage, toiletries, and food. That strategy appears to be working as human-bear encounters have decreased. Before 2012, concerns about hiker safety after repeated bear conflicts required seasonal camping closures for the area.

The Forest Service will continue the food canister requirement this year, from March first until June first. The regulation is mandatory for all dispersed camping in the Blood Mountain Wilderness within a quarter mile of the Appalachian Trail from Jarrard Gap to Neels Gap, which includes the Blood Mountain and Woods Hole Shelters. It also includes the dispersed camping areas within Jarrard Gap. Hikers who don't camp along this section of trail are not required to carry a canister.

Bear-resistant canisters trap odors inside, eliminating the lure of food, and they're designed to be tamper-resistant against extreme force. The regulation requires that the canisters used must be solid and non-pliable. These canisters can be purchased or rented at most retail stores and online sellers that stock camping gear.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.