

Georgia State Parks Nuisance Bear Document

Introduction:

Many visitors to Georgia State Parks marvel at the site of an American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*) in their natural wild landscape. However, like many wild animals, the American Black Bear can change its behavior when its natural range is influenced by contact with people.

The American black bear is found in three different regions of Georgia. This bear has populations in the North Georgia Mountains, in Central parts of Georgia along the Ocmulgee River, and in South Georgia in the Okefenokee Swamp. Adolescent male bears can roam long distances in a search for territory, often along major river drainages like the Chattahoochee. Bears typically inhabit swamps and forested areas. Mature mixed-pine and hardwood stands offer bears the variety of foods they need, and thickets where they can escape for safety. Standing large hollow trees, brush piles and rock caves or crevices are common den sites for bears. In the wild, black bears are omnivorous and opportunistic. Their diet consists of nuts, berries, grasses, and meat. They will eat insects, eggs, and mammals, including deer. Bears are scavengers and will feed on carrion (flesh of a dead organism). Being opportunistic, and having a great sense of smell, bears are attracted to a variety of human activities such as cooking, garbage disposal and recycling, pet foods, bird seed and suet, even tooth paste and baby wipes.

Removing or making attractants unavailable to bears is a key step in reducing bear versus human conflicts. Capture and relocation is a method seldom used as the bear usually finds its way back to the territory it was captured. Often, relocated bears end up crossing major roads, or coming in conflict with other bears in established territories during their journey back to their home territory. When biologists or technicians trap a bear, they may ‘haze’ it upon release with the intention of the bear developing a fear or distaste for human association. However, if this does not work, a nuisance bear may have to be trapped and killed.

Understanding that wildlife behavior cannot be exclusively predicted, nor managed, responsible stewardship involves managing certain activities (such as limiting human-based food supplies) with the intent of reducing the development of harmful behaviors, such as becoming a nuisance or threat to humans. A nuisance bear may: become habituated to people; inhabit or frequent congested areas (such as campgrounds, day-use areas); display unnatural or aggressive behavior toward humans or domestic animals, etc.

Purpose:

The primary purpose of this document is to protect humans and protect bear populations while the two share similar areas.

The primary objective here is to promote positive behavioral responses in both humans and bears, while the primary means will be via a holistic nuisance animal approach described below.

Information, Education, Instruction, and Signage:

All site associates, regardless of their position, can play an important role in educating visitors regarding black bears. Though the key location for this information dispersal may be at site offices and visitor centers, other locations and venues should exist for visitor education. The following is a list of examples of when and how this information could be disseminated.

1. Handouts available to guests advising them of the presence of bears, procedures for handling food/toiletries, garbage, and pets, plus any other site-specific restrictions.
2. Where warranted, overnight guests acknowledge receipt of instructions or notices by signature (see appendix 1).
3. Permanent signage, posters or special notices (see appendix 2 - 4) posted at appropriate areas such as campgrounds, cottages, day-use areas, comfort stations, trailheads, etc.
4. Public interpretive programs focusing on bears and how to safely and responsibly coexist with them.
5. Approved social media may be utilized when additional general public notification needs to be made.

Site Maintenance, Food-toiletries Storage, and Garbage Disposal

Consistent, responsible actions can help reduce creating a “negative reward” atmosphere within the site. By not providing rewards, efforts are more likely to succeed in fostering a healthy relationship between visitors and bears.

1. Managers should develop and implement a maintenance plan to consistently remove human food/garbage from high-usage areas, such as day-use areas, campgrounds, cabins, etc. This plan should adjust for periods of anticipated high visitation.
2. The installation and promotion of the use of bear-proof containers for food/toiletries and garbage storage is recommended. Providing instructions on using a cable or hoist system or similar protection system should be considered, particularly in remote camping areas.

3. Bulk garbage storage areas, such as dumpsters or dump trucks prone to bear scavenging, should be protected by bear-proof lids/hatches, electric fencing (where appropriate), etc.

Enforcement Procedures

1. Observed guest activities that promote nuisance or negative bear behavior should be reported by staff or volunteers to park management. Managers should provide direction as to whether staff or management should address the offending party.
2. When appropriate, DNR Law Enforcement Division personnel should be contacted for further handling of the incident. The issuance of written warnings/citations and/or ejections of the visitor(s) should be considered.
3. When bears are reported or observed as being visibly active in visitor areas, increased patrols are justified to monitor the activity.

Tools and Methods of Discouraging Bears

As needed, the Park Manager should work with the Wildlife Resource Division's Game Management (WRD-GM) section, the Resource Management Unit (RMU), and Region Office to identify tools and methods of appropriately harassing potential nuisance bears. Tools previously used include loud noisemakers (automobile horn, airhorn, shrilling whistles), pain deterrent devices (paintball guns, pepper ball ammunition, rapid fire BB gun), etc. All tools and methods should be legal and approved according to above. Additional training will be available as needed.

Removal Process

Despite the best prevention efforts, a bear exhibiting nuisance or otherwise unacceptable behavior may need to be removed on occasion.

Park Managers, or their designees, should contact their Region Manager and RMU to discuss, if time permits. If time does not allow, directly contact the local WRD – GM technician or biologist to initiate a request. Considerations should be made at the time whether the impacted area(s) will be temporarily closed. It may be necessary to contact the public information/marketing office so notifications can be made that the area will be closed.

Note: Discussions with the Region Office, RMU (and DNR-GM, if needed) should be held prior to re-opening a closed area.

Additional Actions

Additional actions, such as area closures, increased patrols, etc. should be considered and vetted through the Region Office as appropriate.

Administration/Reporting

Reports of bears displaying nuisance behaviors are important and warrant attention. Any significant behavior or incidents between bears and either site visitors or staff associates should be documented, filed, and reported to the park's Region Office and RMU as soon as possible. Documentation should also include actions taken, bear removal, etc.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Visitor acknowledgement statement

NOTICE:

BLACK BEARS ARE EXTREMELY ACTIVE WITHIN FORT MOUNTAIN
STATE PARK



Depart Date _____
Name _____
Resv # _____

Bears belong in our forests and in our parks, but they don't belong in your campsite or at your picnic table. Bears that become habituated to garbage, handouts or unsecured food can be dangerous. All campers must follow these two important rules:

- Do not leave food unattended. Store food in closed containers in your vehicle. Black bears can access coolers.
- Dispose of ALL of your garbage properly in bear proof trash containers located throughout the campground

FINES MAY BE ISSUED FOR VIOLATING THESE RULES

Thank you for your support. To report a bear sighting, please call the Fort Mountain State Park Office at 706-422-1932.

Guest Signature: _____ Date: _____

Attachment 2: GCI metal sign (30" x 30"). Consider posting in high-volume, pedestrian contact areas of the park such as the park office, major trail heads, day-use area, etc.

Bear Country

"ABOUT BEARS"

- You are within the range of the American black bear.
- Wild bears typically keep their distance from approaching humans.
- However, a bear's natural behavior can change if fed human food or garbage.
- Fed bears can become aggressive and may have to be killed for public safety.

Be Aware



(Look for signs like this at campsites or trails)

"WHAT SHOULD I DO?"



- Never feed bears and do not leave food unattended.
- Store all food and scented items in closed containers inside your vehicle or provided storage lockers.
- Put garbage in bear-proof containers, if available.
- If a bear approaches: Be loud, wave your arms, back away- do not turn and run.
- Contact park staff or call 9-1-1 with emergencies.



For your protection, wildlife laws will be enforced

Appendix 3: GCI metal sign (12" x 18"). Consider posting in high-volume areas with less-anticipated contact time, such as: campground comfort stations, garbage disposal areas, parking lots, picnic shelters, etc. These signs may also be appropriate in remote/backcountry camping areas.



Appendix 4: GCI metal sign (7" x 10"). Consider using this sign as a reminder in areas of the park where visitors may be on the move, such as driving, biking, or hiking; lesser trail heads or strategic locations on trails.



Appendix 5: Magnets, stickers, laminated cards available from WRD-GM. These could be left in cabins, or given out to campers to stick on vehicles, coolers, lunch boxes, etc.

