

Spring Is Here, And With It Some Very Hungry Bears: Keep Tahoe Bears Wild!

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LAKE TAHOE, Calif./Nev. – The snow is melting in the Lake Tahoe region and a mild winter has given way to a bustling, early spring for wildlife in the area. Bears have emerged from their dens, are on the move and hungry!

In the fall, black bears experienced hyperphagia (pronounced hai·pr·fei·jee·uh), which is an increase in feeding activity (consuming about 25,000 calories a day) driven by their need to fatten up before winter. Over the course of the winter, bears' bodies utilize those fat stores during hibernation when food is scarce. Come spring, their body mass will have naturally decreased and as a result, bears will be on the lookout for easy food sources to help rebuild those fat reserves.

In the spring, bears come down in elevation to seek out fresh grasses that are starting to sprout, which often brings them into human-occupied areas with green lawns. Unfortunately, these urban areas have an

abundance of human attractants for bears to easily access. It is up to visitors and residents to keep bears from finding unnatural, human food sources.

Bears play an important part in Lake Tahoe's ecosystem and allowing them access to human food and garbage is detrimental to natural processes in the region. Bears help spread berry seeds through their scat, transport pollen, clean up animals that died during the winter, eat insects, and provide other essential functions of nature.

As a result, if they find and access human food and garbage, bird seed, pet food, coolers, and other sources of human food, the Tahoe Basin loses the benefits bears offer to these natural processes. Bears need to be wild animals rather than garbage disposals, especially since these unnatural food sources can impact their overall health and damage and/or rot their teeth.

In fact, bears will unknowingly eat indigestible items from human trash like foil, paper products, plastics, and metal that can damage their internal systems and even lead to death. If these items do make it through their digestive system, they leave it behind in their scat rather than the native seeds and healthy fertilizer needed to grow the next generation of plant life.

Spring is also the time of year that residents or visitors may see a bear they feel looks unhealthy, sick, or orphaned. If anyone has concerns about a bear's state of health, never hesitate to call state agency wildlife experts. If the bear needs help, wildlife experts have the training to assess the bear's condition and transport it to a wildlife veterinarian. Healthy bears mean healthy ecosystems, and we can all do our part to set both up for success!

Follow these important tips to help keep Tahoe's bears wild:

Never feed wildlife.

Store all garbage in and properly close bear-resistant garbage containers, preferably bear boxes. Inquire with local refuse companies about bear box incentives and payment programs. Visit www.ndow.org/Nevada_Wildlife/Bear_Logic/(opens in new tab) for more information.

Never leave leftovers, groceries, animal feed, garbage, or anything scented in vehicles, campsites, or tents.

Always lock vehicles and close the windows. Keep in mind eating in the car leaves lingering food odors that attract bears.

Keep barbecue grills clean and stored in a garage or shed when not in use.

Keep doors and windows closed and locked when the home is unoccupied.

Vegetable gardens, compost piles, orchards, and chickens may attract bears. Use electric fences where allowed to keep bears out. Refrain from hanging bird feeders.

When camping, always store food (including pet food), drinks, toiletries, coolers, cleaned grills, cleaned dishes, cleaning products, and all other scented items in bear-resistant containers (storage lockers/bear boxes)

provided at campsites. Bear-resistant coolers that come equipped with padlock devices should always be locked.

Always place garbage in bear-resistant dumpsters in campgrounds or in bear-resistant containers at campsites (storage lockers/bear boxes), and close and lock after each use.

Store food in bear-resistant food storage canisters while recreating in the backcountry.

Give wildlife space, especially when they have young with them.

Leave small bears alone, as mom might be right around the corner.

“The bottom line is that Lake Tahoe is bear country. It is up to each one of us, including those living in, visiting, or recreating in the Tahoe Basin to practice good stewardship habits by always securing food, trash, and other scented items,” said USDA Forest Service Public Affairs Specialist Lisa Herron. “Good habits will help ensure we keep Tahoe bears wild.”

To report human-bear conflicts in California, contact the California Department of Fish and Wildlife at 916-358-2917 or report online using the Wildlife Incident Reporting (WIR) system at apps.wildlife.ca.gov/wir(opens in new tab). Non-emergency wildlife interactions in California State Parks can be reported to public dispatch at 916-358-1300. To report human-bear conflicts in Nevada, contact Nevada Department of Wildlife at 775-688-BEAR (2327). If the issue is an immediate threat or emergency, call the local sheriff’s department or 911.

For more information on peacefully coexisting with bears, visit TahoeBears.org.