



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

NEWS

Region 2 • 3201 Spurgin Road • Missoula, MT 59804

Contact: Vivaca Crowser, Information Officer, ☎ (406) 542-5518 ✉ vcrowser@mt.gov Web: fwp.mt.gov/r2

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Black Bear Snatches Backpack at Rattlesnake Trailhead

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks received a report today of a sub-adult black bear that visited Missoula's main Rattlesnake trailhead and took a hiker's backpack that was lying on the ground near the trailhead sign.

The hikers involved in the recent incident were a short distance from the backpack when it was taken and no one was injured.

FWP bear management specialist, Jamie Jonkel, said that this incident serves as a reminder that bears are out and active, and hikers, bikers and others in the Rattlesnake and around western Montana should be alert for bears this week, and always.

“While it is not common for a bear to be bold enough to take a backpack lying on the ground near a major trailhead, this type of thing can happen, especially when bears become accustomed to eating garbage and snacks in areas where people are living and recreating,” Jonkel said. “This bear probably found garbage or other easy neighborhood food sources before and was coming back in search of more.”

FWP recommends that those headed out into the western Montana outdoors should carry bear spray and know how to use it. Don't travel alone, and be sure to make noise to alert bears and other wildlife of your presence. Pay attention to fresh bear sign, such as scat, says Jonkel.

People can also help the situation by eliminating food sources that attract wandering bears, Jonkel said. That includes making sure not to leave behind snacks or food wrappers at the trailhead, along the trail, and at picnic areas.

One person's unsecured garbage could be enough to keep a bear coming back in search of more food, which could mean trouble for the next visitor, Jonkel says.

And, neighborhood residents should clean and store barbecue grills, properly store chicken and livestock feed, lock up garbage and put pet food indoors.

Missoula's bear buffer zone ordinance requires those who live in the Rattlesnake and other established buffer zones around Missoula to keep their garbage in bear-resistant containers or enclosures or wait until at least 5 a.m. to put their regular trash cans out and pull them back inside by 9 p.m. Area residents can find out more about the ordinance, see reports on recent bear activity and find bear aware tips at missoulabears.org.

“We want bears around, but we don't want them to congregate searching out neighborhood or trailside snacks,” Jonkel says, “If they don't find something to eat, bears tend to not hang around, and they'll go back to searching for berries and other natural food sources.”

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