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For more information or assistance on this publication, contact the MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, WILDLIFE, P.O. BOX 30444, LANSING, MI 48909.

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Preventing Bear Problems in Michigan



Richard P. Smith



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Wildlife

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Black Bear in Michigan

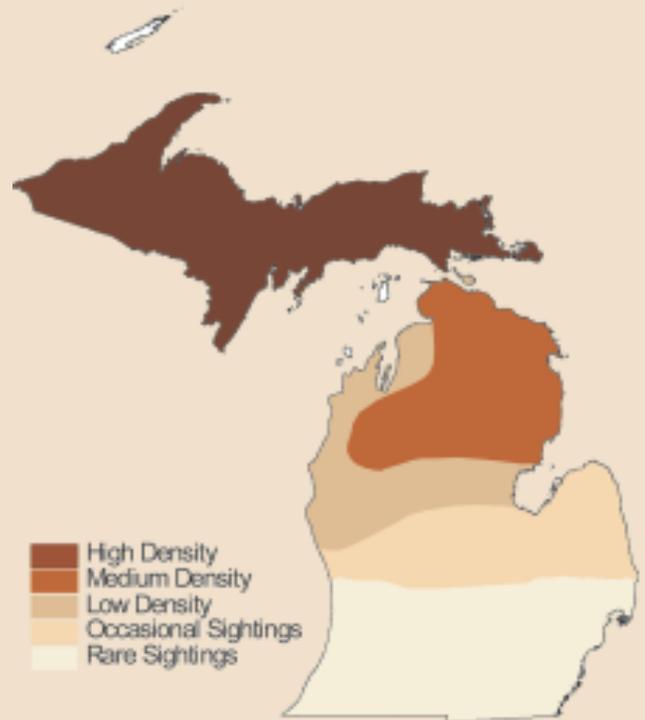
Black bear may be found almost anywhere in Michigan, but are most likely to be seen in the northern two-thirds of the state (see bear distribution map). The likelihood of bear-human encounters will continue to increase as more people move north and vacation in bear range. For some people, the chance to view this elusive mammal in the wild is an exciting, memorable event, but for others, a close encounter with a black bear is a frightening experience. Whether you welcome the black bear or not, all of us that live and recreate in bear range share the responsibility of avoiding activities that attract bear and place them, as well as us, in jeopardy of injury.

The information contained in this pamphlet is intended to help you better understand the Michigan black bear, avoid unwanted encounters, and know what actions to take should a bear encounter occur.



DNR

The Distribution of Black Bear in Michigan



Prevention -

The Key to Avoiding Bear Problems

Spring and early summer are very taxing seasons in the life of a bear. They emerge from their dens with depleted energy supplies following a long winter period of inactivity. It is also a time when food is scarce and family groups begin to break up with the onset of breeding activity. Yearling bear (1-1/2 years old) soon realize that mother no longer favors their companionship when her interest turns to breeding. This is especially true for yearling males who are aggressively driven away by their mother. In search of their own territory, it is these young males who are most likely to come into contact with humans and create problems.

Black bear have enormous appetites, an excellent sense of smell, and are capable of remembering the locations of reliable food sources from year to year. They will travel great distances to find food. When natural foods such as tender vegetation, nuts, berries, and

insects are scarce, bear are likely to come into contact with people. Problems occur when bear attempt to or actually feed on human foods, garbage, pet foods, or birdseeds.

Although most bear are secretive and shy by nature, they will tolerate contact with people in these situations. Because they are large and powerful animals, they must be respected. To avoid possible confrontations and property damage from bear, the most effective and long-lasting strategy is **prevention**.

Never intentionally feed bear! With the exception of baiting for hunting purposes in remote areas, placing food to attract bear near homes, cottages, parks, campgrounds, and picnic areas may teach them to associate people with food. This may place them and people at risk of injury.



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Potential Problems

1. Bear attracted to garbage or other food sources around residences or businesses.



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2. Bear in a tree in a residential area.



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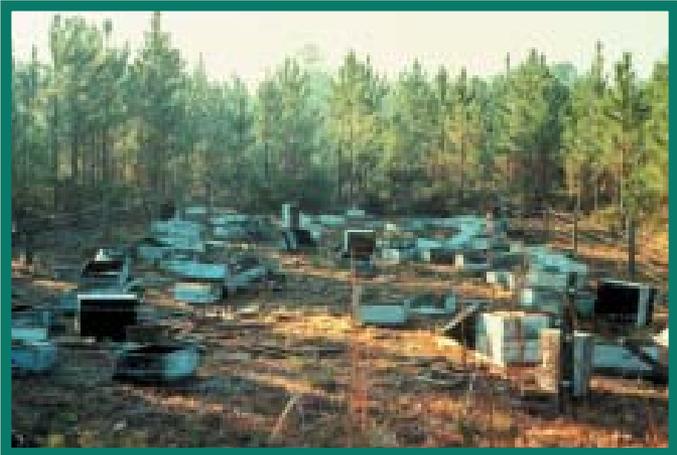
Appropriate Actions

- Keep garbage and odor at a minimum by removing trash often and cleaning container with disinfectant.
 - Keep garbage in a secured area or in a secured container with a metal, lockable lid until disposal.
 - Keep pet food inside or in a secured area.
 - Put out only enough seed for birds to consume in one day. Bring in bird feeders at night and clean up spilled seed on the ground. Stop feeding birds if a bear is attracted to the feeder.
 - Keep barbecue grill and picnic tables clean.
-
- Clear all people and dogs from the site to allow the bear to come down from the tree and leave. Treed bear are more inclined to leave on their own at dark, if undisturbed.
 - If a crowd can not be dispersed, call the DNR RAP Hotline (1-800-292-7800) or the local law enforcement agency.



Potential Problems

3. Bear attracted to beehives, orchard or agricultural crops.



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4. Bear near livestock operation.



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Appropriate Actions

- Establish hives close together near human activity centers, preferably in open areas away from woodlands to make protection easier.
 - Use a guard dog to deter bear or warn of their presence.
 - Encourage hunting in orchards and crop fields with problem bear.
 - Install a temporary or permanent electric fence for long-term protection. This method is very useful for hives, orchards, and crops. Contact your local DNR office for plans (offices listed on page 8).
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- Avoid pasturing livestock in remote locations, areas with heavy cover, or fields adjacent to woodlands.
 - Pen livestock near a barn at night, especially pregnant animals or those with young.
 - Do not leave the carcass of dead livestock exposed - bury, incinerate, or take to a rendering plant immediately.

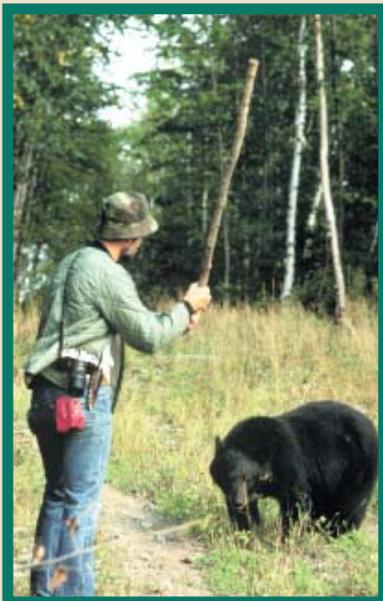
Potential Problems

5. Camping in bear country.



Richard P. Smith

6. Bear encounters



Richard P. Smith

Appropriate Actions

- ❖ Before pitching camp, look for recent bear sign - tracks, droppings, scattered garbage, limbs broken off fruiting trees. Consider moving to a new site if any sign is found.
- ❖ Keep a clean camp - minimize food odors and waste.
- ❖ Food should never be kept in tents.
- ❖ Store food in air tight containers in a vehicle trunk or suspend food in burlap, plastic bags, or backpacks from trees - hang 12 feet above ground, 10 feet from trunk, 5 feet from nearest branch.
- ❖ Always cook at a distance from your campsite and wash utensils shortly after eating.
- ❖ Store waste as you would food - burning or burying waste attracts bears.
- ❖ If a bear comes into camp, a residential area, or is encountered while hiking, first try to scare it off by hollering — leaving a clear unobstructed escape route for the bear.
- ❖ If the bear stands its ground, makes threatening sounds, or bluff charges, you are too close — take slow steps backward.
- ❖ In the rare event of an attack, fight back with a pan, backpack, stick or even your bare hands — black bears have retreated in similar situations.



Problem Bears

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) strives to minimize conflicts between bear and people. An annual hunting season is held to help regulate the size of the bear population. However, unwanted bear encounters may occur even when black bear numbers are managed. The DNR provides technical assistance to landowners to avoid unnecessary bear problems and to maintain public support for sound scientific bear management. Although the State of Michigan does not compensate landowners for damage caused by wildlife, in situations where bear continue to be a problem or cause property damage the DNR will remove offending animals if all recommended control measures fail. Bear will not be relocated for causing minor property damage, such as destroying bird feeders, tipping over garbage cans, or eating pet foods.

Always Remember:

People share in the responsibility of avoiding bear conflicts.

-  Never feed bear.
-  Black bear are wild and not always predictable; always treat them with respect.
-  Encourage and support regulated hunting as a tool for black bear population management.



DNR



Michigan Department of Natural Resources Offices

Wildlife

UPPER PENINSULA

Western UP Management Unit

1990 US-41 South
Marquette, MI 49855
906-228-6561
(Alger [west half], Baraga, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Keweenaw, Marquette, Menominee and Ontonagon counties)

Eastern UP Management Unit

5100 M-123
Newberry, MI 49868
906-293-5131
(Alger [east half], Chippewa, Luce, Mackinac and Schoolcraft counties)

NORTHERN LOWER PENINSULA

Northeastern Management Unit

1732 M-32 West
Gaylord, MI 49735
517-732-3541
(Alcona, Alpena, Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Crawford, Emmet, Iosco, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego, Presque Isle and Roscommon counties)

Northwestern Management Unit

8015 Mackinaw Trail
Cadillac, MI 49601
231-775-9727
(Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Lake, Leelanau, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Missaukee, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola and Wexford counties)

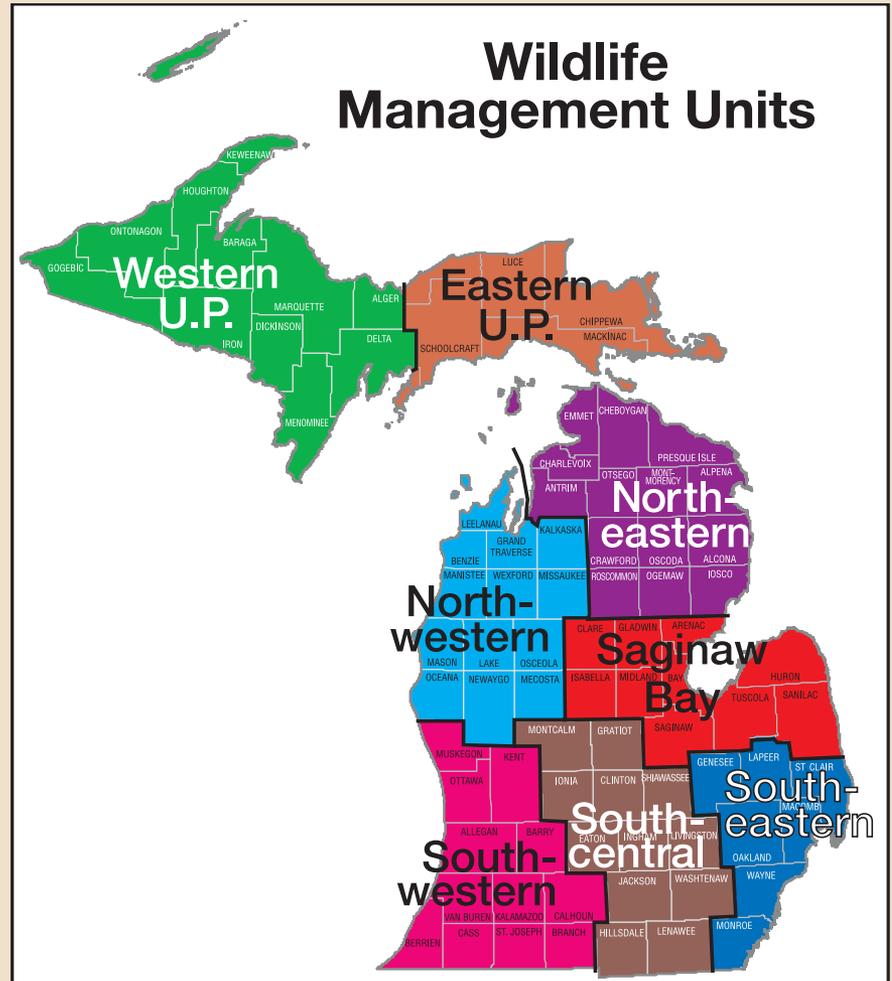
Saginaw Bay Management Unit

503 N. Euclid Avenue, Suite 1
Bay City, MI 48706
517-684-9141
(Arenac, Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Huron, Isabella, Midland, Saginaw, Sanilac and Tuscola counties)

SOUTHERN LOWER PENINSULA

Southeastern Management Unit

38980 Seven Mile Road
Livonia, MI 48152
734-953-0241
(Genesee, Lapeer, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair and Wayne counties)



South Central Management Unit

8562 E. Stoll Road
East Lansing, MI 48823
517-641-4903
(Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Hillsdale, Ingham, Ionia, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston, Montcalm, Shiawassee and Washtenaw counties.)

Southwestern Management Unit

621 N. 10th Street
Plainwell, MI 49080
616-685-6851
(Allegan, Barry, Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, Kent, Muskegon, Ottawa, St. Joseph and Van Buren counties)

