

## Getting ready for the hunt

Ask any member of the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse and he or she will tell you that my favorite time of year is hunting season.

I hunt everything allowed that I can draw a tag for here in Colorado. I even travel to other states and Canada to do additional hunting as often as my funds and wife will allow. But the Colorado hunting season is also a very busy time for the posse. Perhaps you should take a few precautions before heading up for your hunt.

The fall brings and end to the summer weather and ushers in much fiercer winter conditions. These weather events can occur very quickly in the fall, dropping the temperatures as much as 40 degrees in a matter of hours and leaving as much as a foot or more of fresh fallen snow.

What was a warm Indian summer day when you left camp can quickly deteriorate into a blinding snowstorm before lunch.

Let's start by taking a look at your pack.

Now is the time to throw in some extra warm clothes and a hat to keep your head warm. It is still



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

a good idea to keep your rain gear in the pack. Rainstorms are just as likely in the fall and keeping yourself dry is the first step in keeping warm.

A good pair of gloves is essential. Having gloves that are made of a waterproof material such as Gore-Tex is essential.

Consider the blaze orange requirements in the state of Colorado when adding clothes to your pack. I usually use a light vest that can be worn over my heavier clothes. A blaze head-covering is also required for hunters.

It is probably time to put away the lightweight summer hiking shoes, as well. Boots that go at least past the ankle are a much better choice. Again, you will want to have the insulated and waterproof. Boots that use Thinsulate brand insulation work very well here. Again, Gore-Tex will keep your feet dry.

Before the first fall hunt, I go through everything in my pack.

It is a good time to put fresh batteries in those flashlights and the GPS. I prefer the lithium type batteries. They hold up much better in the very cold weather and they last much longer than regular alkaline batteries.

If your pack is like mine, it is an accumulation point for "stuff" tossed in there throughout the year. Things like old wrappers, half eaten candy bars and leftover fish bait can all be tossed. You would be surprised how much extra stuff gets in there.

Make sure that all your survival gear is in order.

Have a couple methods of starting a fire such as a weatherproof lighter, waterproof matches or a small hand-held flare. A little fire-starter will help during those wet conditions.

A good sharp knife and utility tool, such as a Leatherman should be a part of your pack. Take a few moments to update your IFAC (individual first aid kit.)

Then we should probably update that stash of snacks.

Try to have snacks that do not contain high amounts of sugar. I realize that candy bars are great trail food, but they do not provide the necessary protein for a hard day afield. Snack bars, Gorp trail mix, mixed nuts, fruit and canned meats and cheeses are all a much better choice.

If room allows, throwing in a MRE (meals ready to eat) like the military uses is a great idea. I keep several in my truck and ATV all year. The dates on these should be checked also.

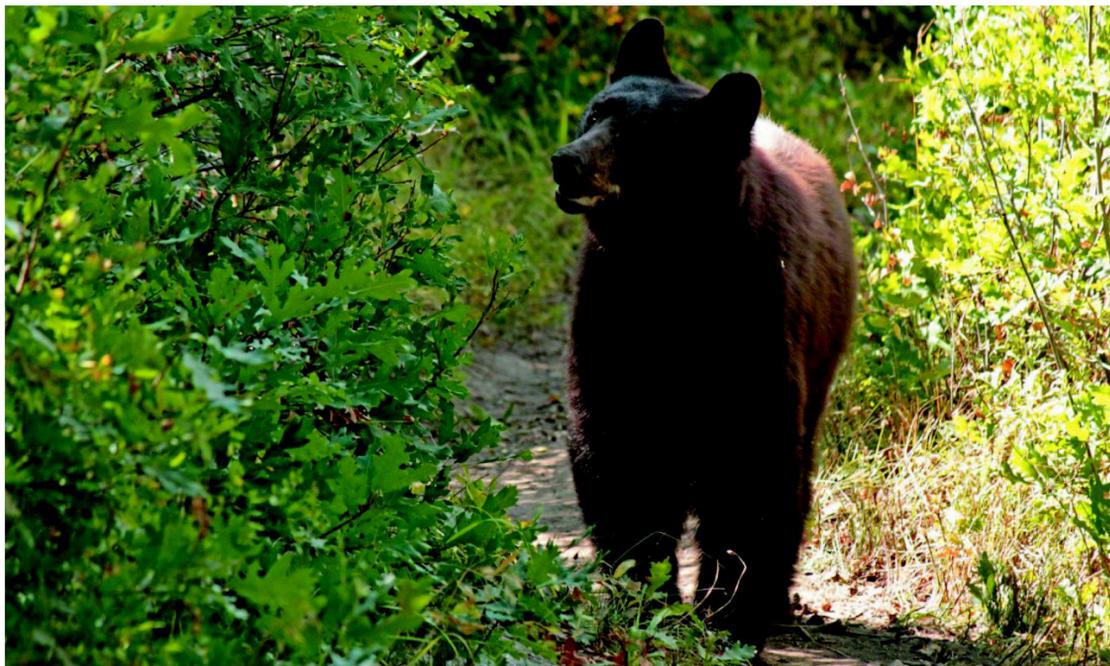
A couple months before the trip would be time to start a little extra exercise, as well.

Remember that everything we do down here in town is going to be more difficult up in the higher altitude. If you have friends coming to hunt with you from other states with lower altitudes, you should consider altitude sickness. Having them spend a couple days in town before making the ascent.

I know that we spend much time at the range, sighting in our rifles. Many of us spend time practicing with the bows. It is just as important that we spend some time going through and preparing our emergency gear before the big trip. It will make for a much safer trip.

Until next time, see you on the trail and have a good and safe hunt.

Mark Rackay is a freelance writer who serves as a director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call (970) 252-4033 (leave a message) or email [info@mcspi.org](mailto:info@mcspi.org).



Black bears have a powerful sense of smell. This one on the Oak Flat Trail at Black Canyon sizes up ripening acorns. (Photo courtesy Wendy Smith - National Park Service)

## More Than Surviving With Bears

Some years ago a friend of mine went black bear hunting. He fried up a batch of bacon, poured the grease on his hunter orange vest and posted himself by the dumpster which sat near the edge of the clump of cabins near a lake.

It seems he didn't have to wait too long. Sparing the details, the effort went badly; ending when he shot the bear from the bathroom window of his cabin.

His intent was to go after a "problem" bear that had been frequenting the area near the cabins. The story goes back decades, and the laws of another state were in play.

Still, it's easy for any of us living in our digital, electronic, vehicle-laden civilization to forget that our world is full of wildlife. One of the primary reasons we live in the rural west is to be near the lands which are home to big game. Survival of these animals is based on our ability to keep them wild.

Bears are a part of our lives from our earliest memories. Storybooks tell of them (Goldilocks, Berenstain Bears, the Teddy Bear Picnic); television uses them, Fozzie Bear (Muppets), the Care Bears; and they show up in all kinds of songs. Even Elvis sang that he wanted to be your teddy bear.

Well, he's probably a long way from the childhood teddy bear that most of us had, named for the 26th President, Theodore Roosevelt. Those bears were our constant companion, a friend during a storm, and you could tell your bear anything in confidence without the secrets being divulged.

Black bears are curious, playful, at times they are cute (especially Smoky Bear), they can stand on their hind legs (similar to us), and they have personalities to which we can relate. Like us, black bears come in different sizes, shapes, and in different colors. They can be blonde, cinnamon, brown, black or shades and mixtures in between,

and they live all across North America.

Yet, they are under stress. Estimates vary, but their statewide population is around 18,000. What do we find if we look at the recent growth in human population in Colorado? In fact, 400,000 people have been added to our state since 2010.

That trend is going to continue, and it might be a good idea for those of us living near or in bear habitat to also be mindful of the stress that humans can bring to their home.

This time of year, bears go into hyperphagia. Hard to say, hyper-FAY-zhee-a, is a period of heavy eating in the late summer and fall as bears prepare for hibernation. They enjoy a varied diet, being both predator and plant eater. They are very opportunistic in what they will munch, so they dig for grubs and rodents, seek insects, fish or carrion along with grasses, berries and young tender plants that are more likely to sprout through the summer in a wet year like this.

A bear's nose, with its powerful sense of smell, can find food sources up to five miles away. If you had the same ability to detect aromas, you could stand in Montrose at Main Street and Townsend and smell your dinner at Pahgre's restaurant.

Maybe you don't want to have that level of ability, but we also don't need to stuff up to 20,000 calories into ourselves each day during hyperphagia. It sort of makes the average human diet of 2,000 calories a day seem much more reasonable.

They become ravenous as they get closer to denning for the winter. Needing to consume that much food means they are searching every waking moment, and actively moving around their range.

It's a thrill to see a bruin, but

most of the time we're likely to see them just streaking across a road. At times, though, they will just plop down on a trail and start eating away.

Pine nuts and acorns are at the top of the list at this time of the year. It can be a bit unsettling to hear them crunch away as they grind up shells, cones, nuts, and all. A colleague found a young one recently chomping away, mouth, tongue and teeth all in active motion as a clump of oaks was giving up the acorns to his appetite.

What they need from us is to give them space to let them be wild. Many of us live close to or in bear habitat. Put garbage away. Don't put out bird feeders until winter. Close your garage doors to keep them out. We all realize hunting bears with bacon grease is a bad idea, but much of our behavior can be just as poorly advised.

Living life fully near wild country means living with all the wild creatures. Mountains, mesas and canyons are dynamic because of the presence of bears. It involves more than simply survival for them or for us.

Paul Zaenger has been a supervisory park ranger at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park since 1993. Other park assignments include Mount Rushmore National Memorial and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.

### IF YOU GO:

Be bear aware before you go. Learn more about living, camping and hiking in bear country at the **Colorado Parks and Wildlife website**, <http://cpw.state.co.us/learn/Pages/LivingwithWildlifeBears1.aspx>.

**Ouray area trails**, <http://www.ouraycolorado.com/things-to-do/hiking>.

**Grand Mesa trails**, <http://all-trails.com/parks/us/colorado/grand-mesa-national-forest>.

**Black Canyon trails**, <http://www.nps.gov/blca/planyourvisit/hikingtrails.htm>.



### Outdoors

By Paul Zaenger

## Prescribed burn planned near Gunnison

The Bureau of Land Management's Gunnison Field Office plans to begin a prescribed burn in the Indian Creek fuels treatment project area as early as Tuesday, or as conditions allow.

The prescribed burn will treat about 125 acres of sage and ponderosa pine.

The burn, located 21 miles southwest of Gunnison, will reduce hazardous fuels adjacent to private development and improve wildlife habitat for elk and deer.

The Indian Creek prescribed burn also reintroduces fire to a fire adapted ecosystem and will help restore healthy forests, species diversity and natural processes to the landscape.

An environmental analysis and detailed burn plan outline the parameters for this prescribed burn.

The BLM has obtained a smoke permit, which identifies atmospheric conditions under which the prescribed burn can be implemented from the Colorado State Air Pollution Control Division for this project.

Once initiated, this prescribed burn may take up to three days to complete. Fire crews will be onsite during the burn — as well as monitor the burn area following completion of the burn — to ensure public safety.

While smoke may be visible in the area at times during the burn, most of the smoke will lift and dissipate during the warmest part of the day. Smoke may be visible in the area for several days after the burn is completed as vegetation in the interior of the burn continues to smolder.

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