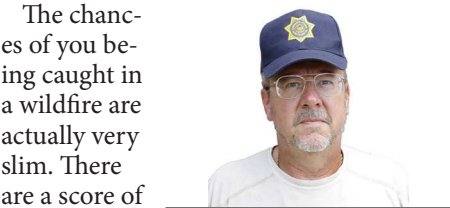


Advice on how to survive a wildfire



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

The chances of you being caught in a wildfire are actually very slim. There are a score of other calamities ahead of that on the list of what might get you a one-way ticket west. I am not talking about getting caught around your home, where an approaching fire might trap you. Rather, let us say you are up enjoying the mountains when a sudden fire approaches.

Like everything else we do, situational awareness is the key. Before you head up to the mountains, be aware of the risk. During dry summer months, where humidity levels are low and winds can be high, the risk of fire can be very high. Before you go, check with authorities for any active fires in the area you wish to visit. An active fire in the area might cause you to not be allowed in the area you wanted to visit.

With that being said, I remember working on the Sunrise Mine Fire on the West End of our county a few years back. Our job was to make certain campers, residents and visitors were evacuated from the rapidly approaching firestorm. We were also tasked with keeping gawkers out.

There were a number of people who refused to leave or argued the whole way. Asking about “next of kin” usually served as a wake up call. Others wanted to get close to the fire for pictures and sightseeing. It was nearly impossible to explain the danger associated with getting close to a rapidly approaching fire.

If an official asks you to leave the area, please comply. He or she does not want to risk his/her life to come and look for you later. Chances are, he/she has had the task of finding the remains of someone who did not evacuate, and does not want to do that again. Wildfire is serious business. Anyone not afraid of a wildfire obviously suffers from soft spots in the head.

During fire season, when you head up to the mountains, have multiple routes planned and several exits chosen, in case a fire catches you. Make sure someone back home knows where you are going, when to expect you back, and what routes you are taking. Always use trail-head registers and then, stick to your planned route. Do not deviate, as the authorities may have to search for you in the event of an evacuation.

You can check the website of <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/dfpc/current-wildfires> for all active reported fires



If you see smoke like this on the horizon, you may be in the crosshairs of a wildfire. Here are some tips for you to stay safe during the fire season. (Submitted photo/ Luke Odom)

in the state before you head up. I check this site on a daily basis when fire season is here.

I know that this is just common sense, but follow the rules. If an area is closed to hiking or camping or there is an open fire ban in effect, obey those rules. I have had to look for people who sneaked past fire lines “to get a better view.” Some of those folks paid the full price, plus tax.

Be ever alert for warning signs at all times while afield. If you smell or see smoke during the day or see an orange glow on the horizon at night, it could mean a fire is nearby. If you hear crackling or see embers in the air, a fire is within a mile and you are at risk. Move away from the area, in the opposite direction of the wind. Remember to try to move downhill as fire travels faster going uphill.

If the fire is upon you, find a place to make your stand. You will not outrun a fire so don’t try it. Many firefighters have died trying to outrun one. Your biggest risk of injury from a fire is not the flames but from the superheated air, which can sear your lungs.

Find an area away from forest fuels to lie down in, paying attention to height of trees above you. A swampy and wet area

or a large body of water is best. The general rule for water is that it should be at least a couple feet deep. Swimming out into the lake and treading water is a very effective self-rescue.

As a last resort, find the largest opening free from any fuels such as trees, shrubs and grass and lie down. Sand bars, gravel washes and rocky areas can all work. Keep your face down close to the ground and find the coolest air you can to breathe. Try to shield yourself from flying embers and debris.

Remove any synthetic clothing you may have on. Synthetics will melt at very low temperatures causing severe burns to your skin. If synthetic is all you have, it is better than nothing at all. It will offer a small amount of protection from low heat where bare skin offers none. Keep you feet pointed toward the approaching fire and cover your face as much as possible.

It may be difficult, but try not to panic. The air above you is superheated and if you get up and run that air will severely injure you in seconds. Remain calm and on the ground is your best chance for survival.

Once the fire has passed, there is still danger. Burned trees can fall very easily and debris on the ground will be white hot. Travel

through a burned area very carefully.

Dry lightning storms this time of year can touch off a dozen or more storms in an area as they pass. If you see any signs of a fire, notify the authorities immediately. If you escape a fire, immediately contact your notification people so that others do not risk life and limb looking for you. Report all fires immediately, even if you have accidentally caused one. While it may carry some consequences for you, it is much better to get people to put the fire out before it becomes a major disaster.

Use general common sense and practice situational awareness whenever you are outdoors. It helps to expect the unexpected and have a plan because you never know when Murphy might be playing with matches.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and 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.

Bear avoidance: CPW issues advisory

By REBECCA FERRELL
SPECIAL TO THE MONTROSE DAILY PRESS

One of the most frequently asked questions to Colorado Parks and Wildlife staff each spring and summer is, “What do I do if I encounter a bear while camping or hiking?”

Whether you are visiting Colorado for a vacation or are a long-time resident, it’s important to learn how to avoid potential issues and discourage human-bear encounters ahead of any outdoor recreation plans.

The first thing to remember is that bears are not naturally aggressive toward humans; in fact, most bears are naturally wary of people. Physical encounters between humans and bears are exceedingly rare.

It is when bears become too comfortable around humans or find an easy food source that these powerful animals can cause damage to property or create conflict with people at campsites or on the trails.

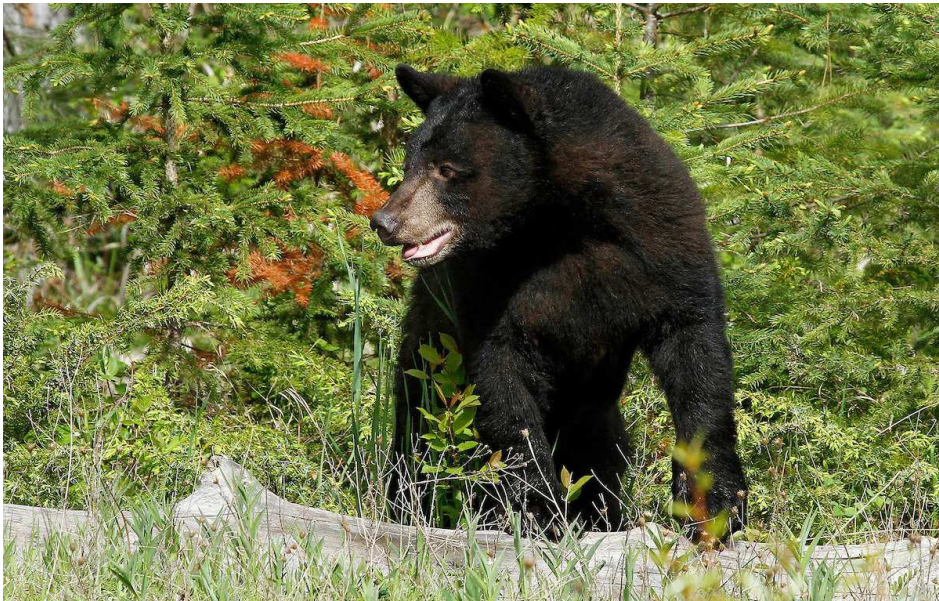
CAMPING

When camping in bear country, the easiest way to avoid bears is to ensure you have nothing at your campsite that will attract them. Whether car camping or hiking into the backcountry, there are actions you can take to minimize your chances of an encounter.

• Safely store food:

If it smells good enough to eat, a bear will try to eat it. Store food, beverages and toiletries in airtight containers and place in provided campsite lockers, lock in your trunk or use bear-proof containers stored away from your tent.

• **Stash your trash:** If a campground provides bear-proof trash receptacles, use them often to keep your campsite clean. If no trash receptacles are available, double bag your trash and lock it in your vehicle, or use a bear-proof container when backpacking. • **Keep it clean:** Scrape grill grates after use, clean all dishes and utensils, and ensure you have cleaned up any waste near your site. Never bring food or anything that smells



A black bear pauses in a forested area. Wildlife officials are reminding the public to be cautious around bears and take steps to avoid attracting them. (Submitted photo/CPW)

like food — which includes toiletries, sunscreen and even clothes you wear when cooking — into your tent.

• **Lock it up:** Be sure your car or RV windows are closed and your vehicles are locked whenever you leave your site or before going to sleep at night.

• **Follow signs (and instincts):** Whether printed signs or natural signs such as tracks or scat, if you have evidence that a bear has been in the area recently, leave and choose another campsite.

If a bear is seen in your camp, try your best to haze it away with loud noises such as yelling, banging pots and pans together or using your car horn or an air horn. Be sure to notify the campground host and other campers.

HIKING

With their tremendous senses of smell and hearing, bears will usually be aware of your presence well before you are aware of theirs.

A bear’s natural instinct will be to leave before you know they are there. However,

understanding bear behaviors and being aware of your surroundings will help you avoid unwanted encounters on the trails.

• **Hike with friends:** Conversation and extra noise will alert bears to your presence and make them more likely to retreat. If your group includes furry friends, keep dogs leashed at all times. Not only will an unleashed dog be more likely to be injured, the instinct to return to its owner may bring an aggravated bear right back to you.

• **Stay alert at all times:** Leave your headphones back at your campsite, be extra cautious at dawn and dusk, and pay closer attention to visuals when hiking in an area with noise from running water or heavy winds.

• **NEVER feed a bear:** Never approach a bear of any size for any reason, especially to feed it. Double bag food and pack out all food waste to avoid encouraging bears to see trails as a food source. Do not think “natural” waste like apple cores or banana peels are okay to leave behind — they are certainly not natural treats

for bears.

• Respect forage areas:

In the late summer and fall, bears are entering hyperphagia, the period before hibernation when their only concern is getting calories. If your usual trail runs through berry patches, oak brush or other known food sources, be extra vigilant. Make extra noise by periodically clapping or calling out to alert bears to your presence.

And if you’ve done everything above and still manage to surprise a bear on the trail? Stay calm, stand still and speak to it in a firm tone of voice. The bear will most likely identify you and leave. Never run from a bear.

If the bear does not leave, slowly wave your arms over your head trying to make yourself look big and continue speaking to encourage the bear’s exit.

If the bear huffs, stomps or pops its jaws, that is a sign that it needs space. Continue facing the bear, slowly back away and keep slowly moving away until the bear is out of sight.

Finally, if the bear approaches before you have a chance to try to force its exit, stand your ground.

Yell or throw smaller rocks in the direction of the bear. If the bear gets within 40 feet, utilize bear spray. If a bear attacks, do not play dead — fight back with anything available, including trekking poles, small knives, or even your bare hands.

It is important to remember that most human-bear interactions are relatively benign; bear sightings and witnessing standard bear behaviors are an awesome sight for most outdoor enthusiasts.

Staying bear aware on the trails or at your campsite, and keeping respectful distances for photos and viewing, keeps these interactions safe for humans and bears alike.

For more information on camping and hiking in bear country, visit cpw.state.co.us.

Rebecca Ferrell is a spokeswoman with Colorado Parks and Wildlife based in Denver.