

Bear Spray



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

After some 60 years of padding around in the woods across much of North America, I can attest to quite a number of bear encounters. I must report that almost all of them have been enjoyable. Not counting the times, I was hunting bear, when I was the one who opened hostilities, bears usually are curious and have no interest in an encounter with humans. In the woods, I have always been more concerned about the 2-legged predator, than I ever was about the predator that had a leg in each corner.

There was the time that a grizzly was feeding along a river, chasing around salmon that were swimming upstream. I was working my way downstream trying to catch a few of those salmon when he noticed me. He immediately took a dislike to the cut of my hair and decided that this river was not big enough for the both of us. I sent a projectile across his bow, causing him to rethink his political views. While he was standing around confused, I backed away from him, although I was completely ready to repel boarders by sending the



You have a better chance of being struck by lightning than to be attacked by this guy. Leave the bear spray at home. (Photo/Colorado Parks and Wildlife)

next slug into his waterline. Fortunately, we both went our separate ways.

Nonetheless, there are a great many people who take to the woods and are insistent on bringing along something to defend themselves from what they perceive as an imminent attack. These are the people making Bear Spray sales see new records.

For the record, when bears stand on their hind legs, many folks think they are getting ready to attack, but this is not the case. They stand up like that to get a better view of you. When they attack, it is on all fours. Usually, the attack only comes when you get between a mother and her cubs, or if you do something stupid, like try to curl up with a bruin for a Kodak moment. Attacks of any kind are very rare, maybe a few a year in all of North America.

The active ingredient

in bear sprays is oleoresin capsaicin, (OC) made from hot peppers. The same thing is used in the self-defense sprays people carry, but the concentration of pepper is higher in bear spray. Pepper spray is an inflammatory agent, burning the eyes, making them tear profusely, sneezing, coughing, and a burning sensation on exposed skin. All of this is temporary, and the symptoms disappear quickly without permanent harm. Pepper spray is not toxic and is effective on people under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

In the old days, many people carried Mace, which was phenacyl chloride, or tear gas. This irritant caused serious pain to the eyes, nose, throat, and skin. The original Mace formula was also found to be very toxic. Those of us in law enforcement have a few stories of Mace from the old days, and how it was often ineffective

against people under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

The bear spray comes in a large can, often times 9 ounces or more, capable of a cone shaped spray reaching out 20 feet or more. There are some that push a cone of spray past 50 feet. The concentration level of OC in bear spray varies greatly on the brand you buy, some being 20%.

Studies claim that bear sprays are 98% effective in deterring or preventing a bear attack, but don't bet the mortgage payment on those results. Of the 83 incidents reviewed in the study, covering a 21-year period, 50 involved brown bears, and 31 of them were curious or just seeking food. In other words, the person with the bear spray just got nervous. Only 18 cases involved an actual aggressive bear.

In most instances, the bear charge was stopped, most often just turning the bear away. The bear usually

did not leave the area, but hung around, probably trying to figure out why his eyes were burning. The studies also found that bears in park areas, more used to being around people, ran away after being sprayed 39% of the time, walked away 52%, and 10% of the time, hung around. Wild bears response was divided pretty close to even thirds in bear response.

Another study was published by the Journal of Wildlife Management found that bear spray is effective at stopping aggressive bears more than 90% of the time. Many encounters do not get reported, and sometimes, what is reported as aggressiveness, is only curiosity on the part of the bear. An angered bear is much more difficult to deter than a curious one.

Keep in mind that the spray comes out in a mist, shaped in a cone, increasing in diameter as it gains distance. This cone is subject to wind or breeze, and if that direction is back toward you, there is strong possibility you will join the bear with burning eyes.

I am often asked if bear spray is effective on human attackers, and the short answer is don't. As for self-defense at home or around town, and if OC sprays are your choice, buy the ones intended for defense against 2-legged attackers.

Of course, use bear spray if that is all you have in camp, and if you are in danger of harm, but it is not near as effective as the CS designed for personal defense. The small cans people carry for defense purposes have a range of around 6 or 8

feet, and the spray comes out like a stream, not a cone, so some accuracy is necessary.

The personal OC sprays also contain an oil base that makes the spray concentrate more on the subject's skin, face, and in their eyes, causing the symptoms to last much longer, so you can escape from the bad guy. Bear sprays do not have an oil base.

Bear sprays are illegal in certain National Parks, and the lists seem to change annually, so do a little search before you carry some. In my humble opinion, I wouldn't spend money on bear spray, especially when dealing with black bears here in Colorado. Most are not aggressive and will usually run away with you making some noise and backing away slowly to leave the area. For serious bear country, such as Alaska or Northern Canada, a shotgun loaded with slugs is magical for bear attacks and can even deter an aggressive bear if time allows for one across the bow.

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Sweitzer Lake boat ramp reopens; Crawford counting down final days of 2025

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

DELTA, Colo. – Following the completion of dam restoration work and with water levels restored in the reservoir, Sweitzer Lake State Park opened its boat ramp to the public Aug. 8.

The ramp at Sweitzer Lake State Park will be open daily from 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. The park will reduce the hours from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. after Labor Day. The ramp will close for the season Sept. 28.

"It's great to see boats back out on the water here at Sweitzer Lake," said Park Manager Scott Rist. "We know our local community has been anxious to see the reservoir refill this summer, and we are excited to

welcome boaters back during these last few weeks of the summer season."

Rist noted that the reservoir is still about a foot below full pool but continues to fill about six inches per week.

"Most boats under 18 feet won't have a problem right now," he said.

While the boating season is just getting started at Sweitzer Lake, it is quickly coming to a close at Crawford State Park roughly 35 miles east.

Crawford State Park aimed to keep its boat ramp open through Sept. 15, but with water levels quickly dropping, it is possible the boat ramp will be closed by the end of August.

"Based on current

projections and unless we get some precipitation, we may have about 20 days left of boatable water," said Crawford State Park Manager Mark Lehman. "It's tricky not having a hard and fast closing date, but we want to let the public know that the ramp will be closed sooner than later this year. The Crawford boat ramp is currently open, but we advise caution because of low water levels. Hazards may exist at any water level, but current conditions increase the risk of unseen obstacles just beneath the surface."

The Paonia State Park boat ramp closed July 17 because of low water levels. Hand-launched vessels are still per-

mitted at the park, but access is very limited.

Crawford State Park is located in Delta County along Highway 92 southeast of Hotchkiss and northeast of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. The reservoir is known as a quality perch and crappie fishery and offers good chances to fish for warm water species such as largemouth bass.

Sweitzer Lake State Park is located in Delta County along Highway 50 south of Delta. The park features a 137-surface acre reservoir for day-use recreation. Sweitzer Lake is considered a good fishing spot for youth with plentiful catfish, bluegill, green sunfish and carp. The



A person jumps off the back of a boat into the water at Sweitzer Lake State Park. (Photo/Dustin Doskocil/CPW)

lake is a largemouth bass trophy fishery. Sweitzer Lake is a catch-and-release-only lake. Fish in this lake contain selenium and are not edible. The park is also an excellent location for bird observation.

Paonia State Park is located in Gunnison County, 17 miles north-

east of the town of Paonia along Highway 133. The 1,523-acre park is popular for camping and photographers interested in capturing wildlife and wildflowers.

Campsite reservations can be made through the Colorado Parks and Wildlife website at: <http://cpw.state.co.us>.



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