



# Hunting Camps and Backcountry Bears

## *How Outfitters and Guides Can Better Protect Their Camps*



*Suspending food between trees, 10-12 feet high, can help safeguard your camp.*



*Bear resistant containers and horse packing equipment are effective tools to prevent bear and other wildlife problems.*

*photos courtesy of Chuck Bartlebaugh, Center for Wildlife Information*

Bears coming into hunting camps are typically a result of attractants being available. Garbage, human food, stock feed, and game meat are all considered attractants and are easily protected from bears. Bear managers and experienced campers in bear country make it a point to keep bears out of camps by following a few simple steps. All bear attractants can either be contained in bear resistant containers, elevated on platforms, stored in containers and suspended between 2 trees, or placed within the confines of a bear-resistant electric fence. Once bears receive a food reward, they will likely return and become bolder until the bear causes damage, injury, or must be moved or killed. Black bears are common throughout forested areas of Idaho. Grizzly bears can be found some in some parts of the state as well. The material presented here will help to avoid problems with either species.

## **Bear Resistant Containers**

Bear resistant containers come in a variety of styles and effectiveness. The Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee has provided a review and endorsed certain types of containers for their bear-resistant qualities. Aluminum panniers and pack boxes are common and effective. Camp food boxes that fold and can be packed and reassembled in camp are also effective. A variety of sanitation devices will be made available through the Forest Service District Offices, as well as can be purchased from a variety of sources in the west. For more information on bear resistant containers call the Living with Wildlife Foundation at (406) 754-0010 for a copy of the *Living with Predators Resource Guide*.

## **Elevated Platforms**

These work well especially in conjunction with fencing. However they are relatively expensive, difficult to move, and present difficulties when using in wilderness. Platforms can be wood or steel and should raise the food cache at least 8 feet above the ground. Black bears are excellent climbers, so install a 2-foot overhang around the edges of the platform. All food, horse feed, and garbage can be stored on a platform.

**Electric Fences: Solar-charged or 110-volt electric fencing is one of the most effective methods to reduce bear damage. An electric fence must be well grounded, sufficiently charged at all times, and maintained on a regular basis.**

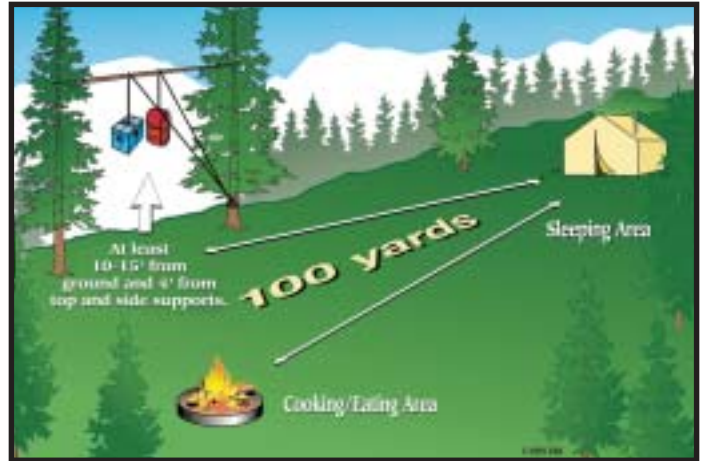
## Suspending Between Trees

Small hunting camps or camps for short trips can easily hang food in boxes, bags, panniers, etc.. Find 2 large suitable trees that can hold the weight approximately 10 feet off the ground. Suspend a rope or cable between the 2 trees at least 10-12 feet high, and make it very tight. Hang a pulley system for heavier food containers or throw a rope over the cable for lighter containers. Raise the food so that it is at least 10 feet off the ground and 4 feet from the nearest tree. Bears are excellent climbers and can sometimes reach out and grab food if it is too close to a heavy limb or tree trunk. Using 2 suspension ropes or tying off on a tree not connected to the cable may increase the security of the cache.

## Electric Fences

Solar-charged or 110 volt electric fencing is one of the most effective methods to reduce bear damage. An electric fence must be well grounded, sufficiently charged at all times, and maintained on a regular basis.

*photo courtesy of Chuck Bartlebaugh, Center for Wildlife Information*



*illustrations courtesy of Chuck Bartlebaugh, Center for Wildlife Information*

**Permanent and semi-permanent electric fences** can be made from multiple strands of electric wire or woven wire attached to wood, steel or fiberglass posts. An electric or solar charger, an energizer and a battery are required to charge the fence. One example of an effective permanent electric fence measures 50X50 feet (often smaller) and costs approximately \$1,200.

**Temporary electric fences** are also effective. A temporary 30X42 foot electric fence costs approximately \$300. A woven-wire electric fence is built with nine steel T-posts driven vertically into the ground. If the soil is sandy or soft and wet, substitute wooden posts in the corners.

Put 1 ½ inch PVC pipe over the steel posts as an insulator. Secure 32-inch high woven wire 6-8 inches above the ground outside the enclosure. Use a loop of baling wire at the top and bottom of the wire to attach it to the PVC pipe. Four strands of high tensile wire, spaced at 6, 16, 28, and 40 inches above the ground, can be used instead of woven wire. Place an energizer cut-off switch on one of the posts to allow easier access to the cache.

**Elevated platforms and electric fences that are permanent in nature may or may not be allowed to be constructed on public land depending on the agency/landowner. Be sure to check with the appropriate land manager before you begin building and placement.**

Other temporary fences can be constructed with electro-plastic netting, electrified twine or hot tape attached to posts or trees. Costs range from \$200 for fences using hot tape to \$750 for electro-plastic netting.

Key features of fence design are strand spacing, energizer type and grounding effectiveness. Wire strands on a permanent fence should be no more than 8 inches apart, and no more than 12 inches apart on a temporary fence. For both types, the bottom wire should be no more than 8 inches above the ground. The top wire does not need to be more than 3 ½ feet high.

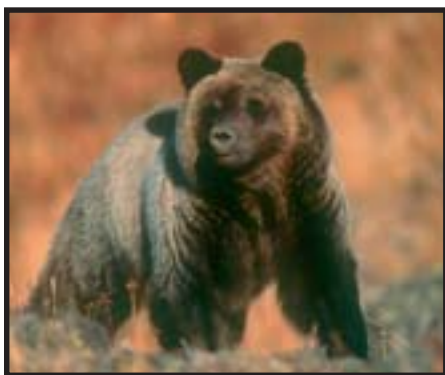
A New Zealand style energizer provides a stronger shock (at least 4,000 to 5,000 volts is needed) than a strip grazing energizer. It also decreases maintenance by reducing the need to clip vegetation growing under the fence. Ground the energizer by connecting it with a wire and a ground connector clamp to a half-inch by 6-foot rod driven into the ground.

A chicken wire mat 3 feet wide can be placed around the perimeter of the fence to ensure that the bear is grounded when it touches the fence. Connect the chicken wire to the grounding rod and pin it to the ground to prevent wind from blowing it into the fence. The chicken wire mat is difficult to pick up if the food cache is moved frequently or if a lot of vegetation grows through it. Under these conditions, as well as when livestock are present, the mat can be omitted.

To protect the energizer and battery from theft and from damage by animals, place them inside the fence.

Although bears seldom break through a properly constructed and maintained fence, some failures have occurred when food was placed close to the fence. Therefore, locate your cache at least 3 feet from the fence.

**Fencing tips:** 1) Electric fencing has been shown to be an effective deterrent for bears. 2) However, fencing should be placed prior to having bear problems for them to be most effective at preventing damage. 3) Electric fencing requires maintenance to assure effectiveness and should be checked each time the camps are visited. Grasses or branches will ground out



the fence and make it ineffective. Using herbicides to kill the grasses around the fencing may be best unless vegetation is

removed by hand or by using a mower or weed whacker. 4)

Grounding rods may be less effective if the soils are dry. On dry soils, use a wire mesh attached to the ground rod to assure a better grounding connection. 5) Check the charge each time you visit the cache, and carry a fresh battery with you to replace the used

battery if it is low. You will lose protection if you have to charge the battery or if the battery runs down before you recheck it.



## Trapping and Removal

When preventive methods fail, it may be necessary to trap the bear and remove it from the area. This often involves relocating the animal to an area where it is less likely to cause further damage.

Relocating bears is expensive and it is difficult to find suitable release sites. Relocated bears often create problems at their new locations and occasionally return to their capture site and cause further damage. When relocation is not a viable option, the bear is destroyed. Trapping and removal must be done in cooperation with Wildlife Services or IDFG after other control methods have failed to reduce bear damage.

## Aversive Conditioning

Aversive conditioning involves associating a negative experience with a food, area or event to develop future avoidance. Taste aversion chemicals have not been very effective. Cracker shells, rubber bullets, bean bags, and other forms of noise and pain aversion techniques have been used successfully. In some instances, certain breeds of dogs (e.g. Karelian) have proven to be very effective bear deterrents. Many of these devices are available from IDFG.

Another method involves wildlife personnel capturing bears near problem sites with leg-hold snares and then tranquilizing, handling and releasing them at the capture site. This technique is difficult to employ, but research has shown it to be moderately successful.

## Kill Permits

If outfitters or others with established camps have made reasonable attempts to prevent recurring black bear problems, kill permits may be issued. Kill permits can be obtained by contacting the local Fish and Game Conservation Officer or Regional Office. Verbal permission may be given to kill a bear if efforts to alleviate the problem have not been successful, or if an emergency exists. Of course protection of human life is allowed. Any bears harvested by a kill permit or in defense of life must be reported to the Idaho Fish and Game and arrangements made for salvaging the carcass.

### What to do when damage occurs.

1. When a bear on private land has damaged property or livestock, the producer or landowner should immediately contact a Wildlife Services (WS) and an Idaho Department of Fish and Game official to investigate. As soon as possible but within 72 hours maximum, WS will determine if the loss is from a black bear and determine the extent of loss without assigning a monetary value. You must contact IDFG to begin the process of filling out a claim.

2. When a bear has come into a camp on public land and caused damage or acted aggressively, the individual should contact the local conservation officer or regional office as soon as practical. If the bear is posing an immediate threat to life or to livestock, the bear may be killed. It must be reported within 10 days. If a bear has been seen in the camp or immediate area but poses no immediate threat, contact IDFG and inform them of the situation. For outfitters, it is important to work with IDFG and the USFS prior to problems arising so that preventative measures such as described in this brochure can be implemented. If problems still occur despite best efforts, other remedial actions will be implemented such as issuing kill permits over the phone, capturing and moving a bear, or performing aversive conditioning.

**Phone numbers to call for information or to report damage: Statewide: WS – 1-800-487-3297 or by region as follows:**

<b>Panhandle Region:</b>	<b>WS – 208-378-5077</b>	<b>IDFG – 208-769-1414</b>
<b>Clearwater Region:</b>	<b>WS – 208-378-5077</b>	<b>IDFG – 208-799-5010</b>
<b>McCall Subregion:</b>	<b>WS – 208-378-5077</b>	<b>IDFG – 208-634-8137</b>
<b>Southwest Region:</b>	<b>WS – 208-378-5077</b>	<b>IDFG – 208-465-8465</b>
<b>Magic Valley Region:</b>	<b>WS – 208-934-4354</b>	<b>IDFG – 208-324-4350</b>
<b>Southeast Region:</b>	<b>WS – 208-236-6921</b>	<b>IDFG – 208-232-4703</b>
<b>Upper Snake Region:</b>	<b>WS – 208-236-6921</b>	<b>IDFG – 208-525-7920</b>
<b>Salmon Region:</b>	<b>WS – 208-934-4354</b>	<b>IDFG – 208-756-2271</b>



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*This publication will be made available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact the Idaho Department of Fish and Game for assistance.*

*Developed by M. S. Nadeau, IDFG, P.O. Box 25, 600 S. Walnut, Boise, ID 83707, 6/25/2003, with drawings and information from Colorado State University from information in their brochure entitled Managing Bear Damage to Beehives, L.E. Meadows, W.F. Andelt, and T.D.I. Beck no. 6.519.*