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## **RESIDENTS IN NORTH JERSEY “BEAR COUNTRY“ URGED TO SECURE TRASH AND OTHER RESIDENTIAL FOOD SOURCES**

**(11/P117)TRENTON --** The DEP is advising residents and outdoor enthusiasts in North Jersey, especially in areas regularly frequented by black bears, to strictly adhere to guidelines for eliminating or securing potential black bear food sources during the fall period when bears feed extensively to build fat layers for hibernation.

Black bears may be especially on the hunt this season for high calorie foods, such as food scraps in household trash and bird seed from outdoor bird feeders, due to localized scarcities of acorns and other tree nuts, which are an important black bear food source known as “mast.” Mast production, especially the acorn crop, is typically cyclical, and this year's scarcity follows two very plentiful mast years. Factors such as gypsy moth infestation, spring frost, excessive spring rain and humidity influence the natural mast production cycle.

In low mast years, such as this year, bears are more likely to exploit alternative foods, such as human trash and bird seed, to provide the calories they need to prepare for winter. Homes and campgrounds become prime potential food sources for black bears when natural foods are in short supply.

The black bear population has stabilized this year in Northwest Jersey as a result of the State Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy, which includes a mix of education, research, hunting, and non-lethal techniques. The result has been a decrease in bear-human incidents compared to 2010. But the mast shortage will increase the potential for bear-human conflicts this fall as bears may become bolder and more persistent in searching for food near homes and campgrounds.

“Residents, hikers and campers can reduce the likelihood of attracting bears if they are aware of all potential food sources for bears and diligently bear-proof residences and camps by removing or properly securing any potential bear food,” said David Chanda, Director of the Division of Fish and Wildlife.

The bear hunt is just one facet of the State’s Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy, which also includes public education, research, bear habitat analysis and protection, non-lethal bear management techniques, enforcement of laws, and efforts to keep human food sources, especially household trash, away from bears to limit bear-human encounters.

New Jersey residents and visitors should be aware that feeding or intentionally providing food for black bears is against the law. Violators could face a penalty of up to a \$1,000 for each offense. Conservation Officers and State Park Police, along with local police departments, will be on the lookout for incidents where food is intentionally provided for black bears.

These simple rules for living in black bear country--particularly Morris, Sussex, Warren, Hunterdon, northern Passaic, northern Somerset and western Bergen counties --will help minimize conflicts with black bears:

- Reducing conflicts with bears is a community effort. It only takes several households with unsecured food for bears to create a nuisance bear that could affect an entire neighborhood.
- Invest in bear-proof garbage containers. If not using bear-proof garbage containers, store all garbage in containers with tight fitting lids in a secure area such as a basement, the inside wall of a garage, or a shed.
- Put garbage out on collection day, not the evening before.
- Wash garbage containers with a disinfectant at least once a week to eliminate odors. Draping ammonia or bleach soaked cloth over containers will help to eliminate odors.
- Do not place meat or sweet food scraps in compost piles.
- Feed birds only from December 1 to April 1, when bears are least active.
- When feeding birds when bears are active, suspend birdfeeders at least 10 feet off the ground. Clean up spilled seeds and shells daily.
- Feed outdoor pets during daylight hours only. Immediately remove all food scraps and bowls after feeding.
- Clean outdoor grills thoroughly after each use. Grease and food residue can attract bears.
- Do not leave food unattended while camping or picnicking.
- Store all food items in coolers inside vehicles where they can not be seen or in bear-proof food storage lockers at State Park facilities
- Never feed a black bear. It is dangerous and against the law.
- Report bear damage or nuisance behavior to your local police department or to the Division of Fish and Wildlife at (877) 927-6337.

To learn more about New Jersey's black bears, visit [www.njfishandwildlife.com](http://www.njfishandwildlife.com) .

To read the State's Comprehensive Black Bear management Policy, visit <http://www.nj.gov/dep/fgw/bearfacts.htm>

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