



DEP NEWS RELEASE

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

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DEP LAUNCHES RADIO AND SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN REMINDING RESIDENTS TO NOT FEED BLACK BEARS

(18/P94) TRENTON – The Department of Environmental Protection today announced the launch of a statewide radio and social media campaign as part of its efforts to help New Jersey residents learn more about living with black bears and heighten public awareness about the risks of feeding them.



“Feeding bears has public safety consequences for entire communities,” said Commissioner Catherine R. McCabe. “It is particularly important for those who live in or visit bear country to be mindful about feeding bears either intentionally, which is illegal, or unintentionally through careless practices around their properties or while out in the woods. Bears that learn to associate people with food can become nuisance bears and public safety risks.”

Under an exclusive Public Education Program with the New Jersey Broadcasters Association, radio spots – **“It’s Wild to See a Black Bear in New Jersey, From a Distance”** – are airing on radio stations throughout the state. The association’s network of member stations airs the spots as schedules allow.

The two 30-second spots and one 60-second spot complement DEP social media outreach efforts, initiatives to work with local police departments on responding to bear incidents, and work with municipalities to educate residents on reducing the potential for bear encounters.

The spots will be distributed as well through the [DEP’s Twitter](#) page and the [Division of Fish and Wildlife’s](#) and [Division of Parks and Forestry’s](#) Facebook pages. In addition, the Division of Fish and Wildlife will be distributing this news release and the radio-spot links via its email list service. To sign up, visit www.njfishandwildlife.com/

“We are very pleased to partner with the DEP on getting this important message out to our vast and diverse listening audience across the Garden State,” said Paul S. Rotella, President and CEO of the New Jersey Broadcasters Association. “Our member stations have a very wide reach and

are eager to help the state communicate to the public that bears are best enjoyed from a distance.”

Black bears tend to most actively search for food in the fall before entering their dens and the spring when they emerge from them. Black bears are not true hibernators but enter a state of semi-hibernation known as torpor and may temporarily emerge from dens during warmer periods of the winter.

The largest land animal in the state, black bears are an integral part of New Jersey’s natural heritage and a vital component of healthy ecosystems, particularly in the hilly northwestern part of the state.

“Black bears have an extremely keen sense of smell and are able to detect scents up to two miles away,” said Ray Bukowski, the DEP’s Assistant Commissioner for Natural and Historic Resources. “Taking precautions with storage and disposal of garbage and other potential food sources is the best way to prevent bears from becoming a nuisance or safety problem near homes or businesses.”



Residents should be aware that the presence of a bear should not be considered a problem. Bears tend to be wary of people. They are often just passing through neighborhoods and should be left alone.

Bears that learn to associate food with people, however, can become a nuisance and are more likely to damage property or be aggressive. These bears may have to be trapped and aversively conditioned or destroyed. As the radio spots emphasize, intentional feeding of a black bear carries a fine of up to \$1,000.

Most of New Jersey’s black bears live in the northwestern portion of the state but sightings have been reported in all 21 counties, underscoring the need to educate all residents about living with bears.

The DEP offers the following tips for property owners to minimize conflicts with bears:

- Secure your trash and eliminate obvious sources of food, such as pet food bowls, easy-to-reach bird feeders, or food residue left on barbecue grills.
- Use certified bear-resistant garbage containers if possible. Otherwise, store all garbage in containers with tight-fitting lids and place them along the inside walls of your garage, or in the basement, a sturdy shed or other secure area. For a list of companies that produce bear-resistant trash containers, visit www.nj.gov/dep/fgw/bearcont.htm
- Wash garbage containers frequently with a disinfectant solution to remove odors. Put out garbage on collection day, not the night before.
- Avoid feeding birds when bears are active. If you choose to feed birds, do so during daylight hours only and bring feeders indoors at night. Suspend birdfeeders from a free-

hanging wire, making sure they are at least 10 feet off the ground. Clean up spilled seeds and shells daily.

- Do not place meat or any sweet foods in compost piles.
- Remove fruit or nuts that fall from trees in your yard.
- Install electric fencing as an effective way to protect crops, beehives and livestock.

If you encounter a black bear in your neighborhood or outdoors while hiking or camping, follow these safety tips:

- **Remain calm. Never run from a bear.** This may trigger its predatory instinct. Instead, slowly back away. Avoid direct eye contact, which may be perceived by a bear as a challenge. Make sure the bear has an escape route.
- To scare the bear away, make loud noises by yelling, using a whistle, banging pots and pans or blowing an air horn. Make yourself look as big as possible by waving your arms. If you are with someone else, stand close together with your arms raised above your head.
- Make bears aware of your presence by speaking in an assertive voice, singing, clapping your hands, or making other noises. If hiking through bear country, always make your presence known through loud talking or clapping of hands.
- If a bear enters your home, provide it with an escape route by propping doors open.
- The bear may utter a series of huffs, make popping jaw sounds by snapping its jaws and swatting the ground. These are warning signs that you are too close. Slowly back away and avoid direct eye contact. Do not run.
- If a bear stands on its hind legs or moves closer, it may be trying to get a better view or detect scents in the air. This is usually not a threatening behavior.
- Black bears will sometimes "bluff charge" when cornered, threatened or attempting to steal food. Stand your ground, avoid direct eye contact, then slowly back away and do not run.
- If the bear does not leave, you should move to a secure area such as a vehicle or a building.
- Families who live in areas frequented by black bears should have a "Bear Plan" in place for children, with an escape route and planned use of whistles and air horns.
- Black bear attacks are extremely rare. If a black bear does attack, fight back.

Report bear damage or nuisance behavior to your local police department or to the Division of Fish and Wildlife at **(877) WARN DEP (877-927-6337)**.

For more on New Jersey's black bears visit www.njfishandwildlife.com/bearfacts.htm

To listen to the bear radio spots, visit

www.nj.gov/dep/docs/bear-radio-spot1.mp3

www.nj.gov/dep/docs/bear-radio-spot2.mp3

www.nj.gov/dep/docs/bear-radio-spot3.mp3

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