What is Food Conditioning?

Food conditioning occurs when an animal becomes habituated to non-natural food sources (i.e. unsecured trash, dumpsters, unsupervised cook-stoves, coolers, etc.) and begins to associate humans with food. Food conditioning can result in potentially dangerous conflicts and can result in the animal being translocated or even euthanized.

Photos by Alycia Scheidel @alyrenwildlife

Behavior and Biology

Black bears are omnivores who rely heavily on vegetation to sustain themselves. Bears in the Pacific Northwest feed on many things including berries, fruit, grasses, the cambium layer of trees, and small mammals.

They need to consume roughly 5,000 calories a day (and upwards of 20,000 calories in the fall to gear up for winter) so they spend a lot of time foraging. Like any of us, bears also enjoy a good nap after a lot of eating! About 50% of their daily activity consists of resting.

Black bears are not always black. They can also be brown, cinnamon, or blonde in color.

Black bears are valuable members of Pacific Northwest ecosystems. They disperse seeds across vast distances and facilitate the return of nutrients to the soil.

American Black Bear

In Washington State

Conservation Northwest

Keeping the Northwest Wild

www.conservationnw.org

Tips for Keeping You and Bears Safe

Encountering a black bear is by no means uncommon. Encounters can be awe inspiring and memorable but it's important to be prepared. **Remember, we are recreating in their home!**

Preemptive measures are the best way to avoid potential conflict with bears. This means taking proper measures to secure trash and store food both in the wild and at home. When camping or backpacking, bear canisters and bear hangs are great food storage options to prevent a bear from accessing your food. And don't forget to store scented toiletries like lotions or toothpaste!

It is generally good practice to carry bear spray in an easily accessible place (and to know how to use it) when recreating in bear country.

Encounters with bears are not uncommon. It's important to ensure mutual safety and respect.

1. Always remain aware and alert in bear country (i.e. refrain from using headphones).
2. Travel in groups of two or more when possible and make noise in areas with limited visibility.
3. Keep pets on leash and under control.
4. Limit outdoor activities between late dusk and early dawn.
5. Carry bear spray and know how to use it. Keep it in an easy spot to reach.
6. Secure food and trash when camping and pack out scraps.

What Should I Do if I See a Bear?

If the bear hasn't noticed you, back away quietly. Never turn your back or run. Give a wide berth and try taking an alternate route.

Announce your presence by speaking loudly and firmly. Say things like, "hey bear!" Most of the time, this will be enough to startle them away.

If the bear begins to approach you start to escalate your attempts. Start yelling "Hey bear! Move on bear!" Make noise, clap your hands, wave trekking poles, jackets, etc. Make yourself look BIG.

If bear continues to approach within 30 ft., use bear spray. Deploy spray in a 'z' shape aimed at the bear.

In the extremely unlikely event that you are attacked, fight back aggressively.