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**Low wild food supplies bringing bears to town**

**Local News**

# Low wild food supplies bringing bears to town

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Whether you call her Mrs Apples or a safety risk, a mother bear with her three cubs has caught the attention of East end Fort Frances.

The family unit has been spotted regularly over the past few weeks, and her movements tracked over social media.

She's also caught the attention of the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry. They have been monitoring her through tips to the Bear-Wise Hotline. Although she has cubs, she is not considered a bigger risk to safety than a solitary bear, but the public has an important role to play in keeping it that way, according to Michelle Nowak, Regional Outreach Specialist for the NDMNRF.

"From the reports NDMNRF is receiving, this family group is frequenting fruit trees and getting into household garbage in the east end," she said. "The best practice to avoid human bear interactions is the management of attractants. Garbage should be stored in secure locations and only put out the morning of pick up. Fruit that has fallen to the ground should be cleaned up as quickly as possible and ripe fruit should be picked."

Being aware of your surroundings is also essential, she added.

“Avoid wearing headphones when out walking and ensure dogs are leashed, as dogs that are not under control may actually lead a bear to you,” she said.

According to Nowak, the Fort Frances District – which includes Emo, Devlin and Stratton – has seen 35 bear reports between April and July 30 this year. That’s compared to 28 for the same time last year.

However, that doesn’t necessarily mean more bears – just more reports, she noted.

“A single bear can generate multiple calls into the Bear Wise Hotline or several posts on social media,” she said.

The role of the ministry is educating the public on how to safely reduce and manage bear interactions, not eliminate bears, said Nowak. Through experience, the ministry has discovered that relocating a bear is largely unsuccessful and shooting a bear is a last resort, and will only be done at the request of police assistance. Instead, the ministry works with residents to create an environment that’s less attractive to bears, and educates people on how to respond to bears in the region.

Bears are attracted into urban areas in the search for food, which is in short supply in the wild, said Nowak. An early spring, followed by a late frost and drought conditions have reduced the wild berry supply – a staple food source for hungry bears.

“When natural food sources are poor, bears will travel long distances in search of alternatives, potentially leading to increased human bear conflict,” she said.

The search for high calorie food is the sole preoccupation for bears; their survival depends on their ability to put on weight before hibernation. In their natural habitat, their energy comes from berry crops throughout summer, then mountain ash, acorns and other nuts towards the fall. Although they will also eat carrion, insects, fish, deer fawns and moose calves, the bulk of a bear’s natural diet is plant material – unless, like this year, that food is in short supply.

“This leads bears into urban areas in the search for food, like garbage, bird seed and fruit trees which are relatively easy to acquire. Once bears have learned they can find food where people live they will return again and again,” said Nowak. “Managing known attractants is the best practise to avoid interactions.”

That includes storing garbage in an inaccessible location, keeping bird feeders in storage until the winter months, and keeping pet food indoors and off porches.

Be aware of odours which may attract bears. Choose trees and shrubs which don’t produce fruits or nuts for your property. If you already have them, be diligent in picking ripe fruits and

**For information on preventing bear encounters, and how to react when faced with a bear, visit [www.ontario.ca/page/prevent-bear-encounters-bear-wise](http://www.ontario.ca/page/prevent-bear-encounters-bear-wise).**

**Non-emergency encounters**

removing fallen ones. Cooking odours from a barbecue can also attract attention from bears and if your barbecue becomes a reliable source of calories, they may continue to return to it. To discourage regular visits, burn off food residue, clean the grill and empty the grease trap right after every use, and remove utensils, dishes and leftovers immediately after eating.

When encountering a bear, the public has a number of options. Most bear encounters are not cause for alarm. These would include bears roaming through yards, checking in or knocking over garbage cans, barbecues and bird feeders, climbing up trees, or breaking into sheds where garbage is kept. In these cases, the public is asked to call the Bear-Wise hotline, at 1-866-514-2327. It operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and alerts the ministry of bear activity in the area. The data is used to determine ministry responses. An employee may visit the site to determine any attractants in the area, and may help residents to make the area less attractive to bears.

An emergency encounter with a bear would include a bear in a schoolyard while class is in session, or a bear that is stalking people, attempting to enter a residence, wandering into a public gathering, killing livestock or pets, or lingering at a site instead of roaming through. In these cases, a call to 911 or the local OPP is appropriate.

Call the toll-free Bear Wise reporting line at **1-866-514-2327** if a bear:

- roams around or checks garbage cans
- breaks into a shed where garbage or food is stored
- is in a tree
- pulls down a bird feeder or knocks over a barbecue
- moves through a backyard or field but does not linger

**This line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from April 1 to November 30.**


### Emergency situations

Call 911 or your local police if a bear poses an immediate threat to personal safety and exhibits threatening or aggressive behaviour, such as:

- enters a school yard when school is in session
- stalks people and lingers at the site
- enters or tries to enter a residence
- wanders into a public gathering
- kills livestock/pets and lingers at the site

Police will respond first to an emergency situation, but may request assistance from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry during daylight hours.



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