

Good Ideas for Recreating in Bear Country (JBER)

Never approach a bear and never feed a bear (intentionally or unintentionally)!

Be Alert and Proactive: Understand and commit to the idea that bears can be anywhere on JBER. Review the information in this document and visit the links at the end for more information. Mentally practice what you would do in different bear encounter situations. Be aware of your surroundings. Be especially attentive when in areas or conditions that would tend to decrease a bears ability to sense you (e.g. near streams, areas of dense vegetation, blind corners, crest of hills, when traveling into the wind, etc). Look for signs that bears may be in the area such as scat, tracks or obvious food sources (e.g. salmon, animal carcass, etc), and remember to be noisy! Avoid situations and areas such as these where there is a greater likelihood of encountering or surprising a bear, if possible.



A bear approaches a visitor along a road at Brooks Camp in Katmai National Park and Preserve, Alaska. NPS Photo / Jake Bortscheller

Don't Recreate Alone: Humans in a group are louder, have more scent and are more intimidating to bears than a single person. This is particularly true where recreationist travel fast and quiet, e.g., biking or running while wearing headphones or ear buds. When biking or running, it is suggested you refrain from wearing headphones or ear buds which drastically reduces your awareness and periodically make noise. If you insist on wearing headphones or ear buds, sing along with the music, particularly in the areas mentioned above.

Make Noise: A common cause of a bear mauling is startling a bear, particularly a sow with cubs. Announce your approach, make loud statements such as, "hey bear" (or whatever phrase works for you), clap, talk, sing or rattle a bell frequently.

Bear Spray: Carry bear spray with you when you recreate. Ensure that you have practiced using bear spray prior to recreating on JBER. Carry the bear spray in a holster readily accessible on you, not in a pack. It is recommend that the bear spray contain 1-2% Capsaicin or related a compound, Capsaicinoids.

Consider watching the informational video on choosing and deploying bear spray created by the National Park Service- <https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/photosmultimedia/bearsprayvideo.htm>

Avoid Recreating at Dusk and Dawn: Animals have a tendency to be most active during this time of day.

Dogs: Unleashed uncontrolled dogs can bring a bear right to you, it is recommend you leave your four legged friend at home or keep them on a leash when recreating.

Surprise Encounters: If you see a bear at a distance and the bear does not see you, quietly leave the area. If the bear notices you, stay calm and don't run! Stand your ground, face the bear and calmly let it know that you are human: slowly wave your hands above your head and talk in a low voice. Try moving slowly away from the bear. If the bear approaches as you back away, stop and stand your ground. Make yourself appear larger by standing next to your buddy and continue to wave your hands above your head and talk calmly. Ready your bear spray. If the bear stops, try backing away again. If the bear continues to approach, consider adopting a more assertive stance: raise your voice, use a noise maker (i.e. air horn, beating metal together, clapping loudly, etc.), stamp your feet or strike the ground with a stick, etc. If the bear continues to advance, consider spraying a short burst of bear spray aimed just below the face of the bear (remember the wind direction will affect your ability to direct the bear spray).

False charges are common, do not play dead when a brown bear charges unless contact is made. If you do play dead, keep your backpack on for back and neck protection, fall to the ground onto your stomach with your hands clasped on the back of your neck and your elbows and feet spread so that the bear cannot easily turn you onto your back. If the bear does roll you over, continue to roll onto your stomach.

If a black bear makes contact OR if a brown bear attack is prolonged, fight back vigorously as if you are fighting for your life (at that point you are). Concentrate your blows to the face and muzzle.

Report: Suggest everyone report all brown bear sightings, e.g., when, where, direction of travel and any observed behavior to the Conservation Law Enforcement Office at, 552-9453 or 552-8609. Additional bear safety inquiries can be directed to the natural resource staff at, 384-3380, 384-3321 or 384-6224.

References:

<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/?adfg=livingwithbears.bearcountry>

<https://www.tripsavvy.com/bear-safety-tips-3361625>

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/bears/safety.htm>

<http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/safety/bears.htm>