

# Living with Wildlife

North Fork Preservation Association 2021

The meadows, mountains and rivers of the North Fork are home to wildlife as well as humans who live and recreate in these areas. This interface can lead to conflict in which the wildlife usually loses. While private lands make up only 3% of the North Fork valley, they offer some of the best wildlife habitat. This brochure offers suggestions on how we can better coexist with our wildlife.



Grizzly trying to get to food source FWP photo

## Grizzly Bears and Black Bears



Grizzly bears, Diane Boyd photo Black bears, Diane Boyd photo

The most talked about conflict is between humans and bears, both grizzly and black bears. Bears that get food rewards or become comfortable around human habitations generally end up dead from conflicts. Once bears

find a food source, they become habituated and *will* return for more.

### Ways you can avoid attracting bears:

**Store attractants indoors** including garbage, BBQ grills, coolers, recyclables, pet food and pet bowls, hay pellets, etc.

**Remove bird feeders** when bears are active. Bird seed and hummingbird feeders bring bears to human residences, resulting ultimately in the death of the bear. Instead, plant flowers, hang flower baskets for hummingbirds and pollinators or put out a bird bath.

**Protect bear attractants with electric fence.** Compost piles, chickens, goats, sheep, beehives, fruit trees and gardens attract bears. Many online resources are available for this inexpensive and effective bear deterrent. See: [www.bebearaware.org](http://www.bebearaware.org)

**Big game harvesting.** Don't hang carcasses outdoors *unless* it is at least 10 feet above the ground or 10 feet from anything that a bear may climb. Since bears are driven in the fall to gain calories before hibernation, taking your game to a butcher asap is a good option. Animal carcasses stored in a garage or shed have resulted in significant damage from bear break-ins.

**Do not store food in your vehicle.** Bears will tear apart a car to get food.

**Always hike with bear spray containing capsicum** and keep it handy (not in your pack). Know how to use it, practice *before* you need it. Correct use of bear spray has proven to be more effective than using a firearm to deter an attack

and to reduce severity if attacked. If you encounter a bear, pull the safety clip off your bear spray, hold with both hands, aim slightly downward in front of the bear, stay calm, talk in a monotone voice, avoid eye contact, back away and leave the area. Do not run! Bear spray can reach a maximum distance of 25 feet. You can spray a short blast when the bear is at 60 feet and charging so the bear will run into the cloud of spray and hopefully turn and run away. Save the big blast for closer range. If attacked, drop to the ground, protect the back of your neck with your hands and try to spray the bear.

## Mountain Lions



Mountain lions (cougars, panthers) are rarely seen although they occur throughout the North Fork. Solitary and elusive they tend to avoid humans. But they can be a threat to humans and pets, especially if you are feeding wildlife that lions prey upon. Don't leave pets or small children unattended outside. Remove vegetation around your yard to reduce hiding cover. Provide sturdy shelter, electrified preferably, for chickens, goats and sheep, and bring them into an enclosed shed at night. If you encounter a lion, face the lion, make yourself appear as large as possible, yell at it, pull out your bear spray and do not run. Convince them that you are dangerous and not prey.

## Wolves and Coyotes



Wolf



Coyote

Wolves and coyotes are social carnivores living in packs and pairs throughout the North Fork. They may be attracted to pets, livestock and wildlife feeding areas. Keep your home and camp area clean to avoid attracting these canids. Follow the same guidelines as for lions. If you encounter wolves at close range, face the wolves, act aggressively, pull out your bear spray and do not run. Wolves may defend their pups by trying to scare you away with howling and barking.

## Bats and Woodpeckers

Bats are a critical part of our ecosystem, and eat huge numbers of pest insects every night. However, they are not usually desired as house mates. The best way to get rid of bats is through exclusion by sealing all holes and cracks through which bats may enter your home. This should be done in the fall or early spring when the bats are not present. Bat houses can be installed on poles or outbuildings near your house. For more information see <https://www.batcon.org/about-bats/bats-in-homes-buildings/>

Woodpeckers can be difficult to discourage. Try hanging strips of flagging in areas that the birds are drilling into. Plastic owls that are moved

around can offer temporary discouragement. Cover damaged area with metal. Permanent modifications to replace vulnerable wood with metal or concrete siding is the best way to deter woodpeckers. This will also make your house more fire-proof.

## Your Pets

Dogs and cats can be problematic for resident wildlife. Do not let your dog or cat roam free where they can harass and kill wildlife. And you might save their lives by keeping them close to home. A person who purposely, knowingly, or negligently permits a dog to chase, stalk, pursue, attack, or kill hooved game animals is guilty of a misdemeanor and is subject to the penalty in 87-1-102(1), and may be fined.



## Moose

Moose can be aggressive and dangerous, especially females with young calves. Bull moose during the autumn rut also become more dangerous. If a moose stops eating to look at you, back off immediately. And if the moose lays back its ears and the hair stands up on its neck and back, an attack is imminent. Back away and be prepared to run. Use your bear spray if needed.



North Fork cow and calf moose. Gerry Stearns photo

## Deer and Elk

Do not feed them or put out salt licks! It not only attracts bears, lions and wolves but it is also *illegal* and you may be fined. Deer and elk have been known to attack humans and pets, and cause serious damage or death with their pummeling hooves. This is especially true when the females have small fawns and calves with them that they will protect vigorously.

If you see a fawn/calf by itself **do not pick it up**. Mama has stashed her baby so she can go feed, and the baby has not been abandoned. If you pick up the baby you have given it a certain death sentence.

***Please remember that we and the wildlife are sharing the North Fork, and we need to help each other get along. Thank you.***

More info at: [www.gravel.org](http://www.gravel.org) and [fwp.mt.gov](http://fwp.mt.gov)

Report grizzly bear problems to MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks 406-752-5501, and grizzly bear manager Tim Manley 406-250-1265. Report black bear and cougar problems to Erik Wenum 406-250-0062.