



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# National Elk Refuge

## *2013 Bear Safety*

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### **General Information**

Grizzly bears have been sighted on the National Elk Refuge, including designated elk and bison hunting areas. These bears may be habituated to humans and not as wary as other bears. All grizzly bears in the Yellowstone ecosystem are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act and protected by federal law.

Research shows that grizzly bears seek out gut piles during the hunting season. During Refuge hunting seasons, the availability of carcasses and gut piles may bring grizzly bears and hunters into close proximity in heavily-used hunt areas. Some bears will vigorously defend gut piles. This behavior should be expected in bear country, and it underscores the risk to bears and humans associated with hunting in grizzly country.

Please keep in mind that you may encounter bears – including those feeding on gut piles – at any time and in any location. Be alert for the presence of bears at all times! Do not leave a carcass unattended, and be extra alert when field dressing your elk or bison.

### **Bear Spray**

Research has shown that bear spray is a highly effective deterrent during an encounter with a bear.

In a *Journal of Wildlife Management* publication by Smith, et al.<sup>1</sup>, bear spray was found to stop bears' undesirable

behavior 90–100% of the time.

Personal defense pepper spray is not the same as bear spray. Bear spray labels will clearly state it is for stopping charging or attacking bears. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulates bear spray, and the minimum size can the EPA will register is currently 7.9 ounces. Carrying an accessible can of non-expired bear spray is not a requirement of your Refuge hunting permit but is highly recommended.

### **Special Precautions**

The bison hunting season on the National Elk Refuge began on August 15; the elk hunting season opens on October 14. Refuge officials are urging hunters to be “bear aware” and take steps to avoid bear-human conflicts.

Hunting, by nature, is an activity that may increase the chances of a bear encounter. Hunters typically move quietly through the woods, with the wind in their face and often in areas inhabited by bears and other wildlife. Hunting in bear country requires added attention and preparation. For your safety and the safety of bears, consider the suggestions below while participating in Refuge bison and elk hunting seasons.

### *While Hunting*

Consider:

- Hunting with a partner.
  - Carrying bear spray and
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knowing how to use it.

- Avoiding “dark” timber during mid-day when bears may be using a day bed.
- Having a predetermined plan of action for retrieving harvested game from the field.
- Being extra cautious after making a kill and when hunting in areas where animals have recently been harvested.
- Avoiding hunting in areas where fresh bear sign is repeatedly observed.
- Avoiding gut piles.

#### *Field Dressing / Carcass Retrieval*

Consider:

- Taking extra precautions during field dressing, and having your bear spray unholstered and readily available.
- Packing game out as quickly as possible. Do not leave it in the field overnight.
- Separating the entrails from the carcass if you will be removing the carcass later in the day. This may decrease the chance a grizzly will be on your carcass when you return to retrieve it.
- Approaching carcasses with caution; make noise; stay alert.

#### *Bear Encounters*

Contact Refuge Law Enforcement or call (307) 733-9212 if you:

- Are bluff charged.
- Are mauled.
- May have injured or killed a bear.
- Discover that a bear has claimed a carcass.

#### **Food Storage Requirements**

Know that bears may be present, even if you can't see them.

Odors attract bears. When not in immediate use, all food, drinks, garbage, toiletries, cookware (clean or dirty), stoves, grills, coolers and food containers (empty or full), pet food/bowls, and any odorous item that may attract a bear must be kept in a bear-resistant food storage locker or in a hard-sided vehicle with doors locked and windows closed. These items should not be stored in the back of a pickup truck that does not have a hard-sided topper.

- Improperly stored or unattended food will be confiscated and could result in a fine.
- Treat odorous products such as soap, toothpaste, fuel products, suntan lotion, and bug spray in the same manner as food.
- Place all trash in bear resistant garbage dumpsters.
- Keep pets under physical restraint and never leave them unattended.
- Immediately report food storage violations and all bear sightings to the nearest law enforcement officer or game warden.

<sup>1</sup>Smith, T., S. Herrero, T. Debruyne, and J. Wilder. 2008. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 72(3):640-645.

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