

## **Black Bear Response**

Wisconsin has a thriving black bear population. The **primary** range is the northern 1/3 of the state but bears are expanding their range in the central and southern counties. Human-bear conflicts have increased with this expanding population.

The southerly dispersal of bears coupled with the growth of recreational and residential land development in open areas increase the potential for human-bear encounters. Further, the bears can be attracted to a number of artificial food sources such as bird feeders, greasy grills, dog food, garbage, gardens and compost piles. While it is exciting to see a bear in your backyard and you might sacrifice bird seed for the chance to watch a bear up close, the encounter comes with a high cost: Once a bear associates people with food, it will be bolder, escalate efforts to obtain food and may pose a safety risk. Though bear attacks on people are relatively rare, they can be serious. Most often, these attacks are defensive when a bear has been startled.

In their drive to find food, bears will take advantage of any readily available food sources, whether natural or from human activity. Even though bears are naturally shy creatures that avoid people, a hungry bear exploiting a food source can quickly learn to associate humans with food and can become a nuisance. The bears are merely responding to their need to consume large amounts of food.

Bears threaten crops, apiaries, fruit trees, campgrounds, livestock, buildings, and other property. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and partners receive hundreds of complaints annually about black bears. The Department attempts to minimize human/bear conflicts by explaining ways to coexist with black bears, controlling bear populations through hunter harvest, and providing direct assistance for some bear complaints.

These guidelines assure that the Department's response to black bear damage and nuisance situations is fair and consistent, yet allow discretion for local circumstances and public safety emergencies.

### **Bear Management Responsibilities:**

The Wisconsin DNR – Bureau of Wildlife Management has primary responsibility for the management of black bears in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin DNR has entered into a cooperative services agreement with USDA-APHIS-WIS to assist with bear complaints. The Wisconsin DNR – Conservation Wardens may also respond to nuisance bear complaints when DNR-Wildlife Management or USDA-Wildlife Services are unable to respond.

**Whenever possible all bear complaints shall be directed to the USDA-Wildlife Services Office for screening and determination of response level rating.**

Wildlife Services - 800-433-0663 and 920-324-4514.

Directing all calls to one location assures consistency and efficiency in responding to nuisance bear conflicts. Each USDA-WIS District Office maintains a toll-free line specifically for this purpose. **During the period of high bear complaints, including weekends and holidays, USDA-WIS voice mail is checked frequently.** Routine complaints will be handled during the work week and urgent complaints will be responded to immediately.

**Bear Incident Response Ratings:**

The following ratings have been created so bear complaints can be placed in a general category based on an assessment of the complaint in order to consistently apply management actions throughout the state. It is understood that not all bear complaints will fit neatly into a single category. These situations call for judgment on the part of DNR staff and USDA-Wildlife Services. Upon receiving a report of a bear incident, DNR and USDA-Wildlife Services should classify the situation as one of the following categories.

**Level 1**– *The bear is an immediate threat to human health and safety. These incidents require an immediate site visit and the bear may need to be euthanized. Examples of these situations include:*

- *Bear has attacked or injured a person*
- *Bear has entered a human occupied dwelling and remains on site*
- *Bear is sick or injured and unable to leave the area and poses an immediate threat to human health and safety*
- *Bear is in an urban area and unable to find an escape route*
- *Bear is displaying aggressive behavior towards people (beyond simply bluff charges or jaw popping), bear is unafraid of people*

**Level 2**– *Level 2 incidents have the potential to escalate into a human health and safety concern. These incidents typically do not require an immediate site visit. Non-lethal or lethal control may be implemented based on the situation. Examples of Level 2 Incidents include:*

- *Bear has damaged a home and or damaged or entered other un-occupied structures (barn, sheds, etc), but is no longer on-site*
- *Bear is observed frequently entering a campground during the day and/or bear is raiding camp sites*
- *Bear is habituated to people and observed during the day, reluctant to leave location but not aggressive (complainant has complied with removing possible attractants).*
- *Bear is sick or injured but is not posing a human health and safety threat (is able to move, escape into woods, etc.)*

**Level 3** – *Bear has caused minor property damage. These incidents generally do not require a site visit and can often be handled by providing technical advice/guidance over the phone. Examples of Level 3 Incidents include:*

- *Bear has damaged bird feeders*
- *Bears have knocked over garbage cans or are feeding in dumpsters*
- *Bears in captive deer farms utilizing deer feed (no verified depredations)*

**Level 4** –*Bear is reported exhibiting normal behavior and is not considered a threat to public safety or personal property. A site visit is not needed and these incidents should be handled by providing technical advice/guidance over the phone. Examples of Level 4 Incidents include:*

- *A bear observed walking through a back yard*
- *A bear is reported crossing a road*

If a bear sighting is determined to be a level 3 or 4, and the bear is not in the immediate area, the public should be directed to remove all food sources (grills, bird feeders, garbage cans, pet food, compost piles) so the bear has no reason to remain on site. People should not approach bears, or block escape routes.