

VERMONT'S BLACK BEAR NATURAL & WILD



Natural and Wild

"Like rivers and forests, wild things never take for granted wild progress began to slip away with them. Today we face the question of whether a higher standard of living is worth its cost in things natural and wild."

Conservationist Aldo Leopold made this observation more than half a century ago. Today it is truer than ever. Many people consider Vermont's Eastern Black Bear a symbol of something natural and wild. Bears are something in us that recalls days when people were closer to the land. But just how much will our modern standard of living cost? Will bears, and other natural and wild things, still be here in another half century?

Bear Habitat

Eastern Black bears require forests for survival, but not just any wooded area will do. Bears need stands of oak and beech trees that produce nuts for food in summer and fall. Bears also need woodland forest habitat, where they get food in spring. Because bears

use different habitats seasonally, they must also have a way to move among them. Bears travel through "corridors" to move across roads or through developed areas from one habitat area to another.

Bears are large animals, and they require large, undisturbed areas of habitat. Through careful management of habitat, today's Vermont black bear population is robust. But, bears face continuing pres-

ure of "fragmentation." Habitat fragmentation causes many problems for bears. It restricts them from moving about their home ranges. It reduces their supply of natural food. It increases the chance of collisions with automobiles. Perhaps worst, it causes them to come in more frequent contact with people. If we are to keep our bear population healthy, we must find ways to prevent and minimize fragmentation of their habitat.

When Bears and People Interact

People love to see the Eastern Black Bear in its natural surroundings. But when bears wander into human territory, problems can occur. Often, bears pay the price. Bears can get all the food they need from the forest, but they are opportunists. This means they eat whatever food they can find most easily. When a chance for easy food presents itself, bears take advantage of it. People often encourage bears to come out of the forest by providing food without realizing it. Once bears become used to these food sources and come into frequent human contact, people sometimes call them "trai-

soned bears," but they are just being bears! Here are some of the most common sources of food provided by people that attract bears:

- *Never feed bears, deliberately or accidentally.*
- *Feed pet humans.*
- *Feed birds from December to March only.*
- *Store trash in a secure place. Trash can alone are not enough!*

People need to remember that bears are wild animals. Everyone is better off when bears stay in their natural habitat—the forest.

Bears—Many Things To Many People

Vermonters value bears for many reasons. Some hope to view a bear while hiking. Others never need to see one—just knowing that bears roam the woods improves the quality of their lives! Still others see bears as a traditional food source, just as people have for the thousands of years. Those folk find that bear hunting is a thread that leads them to the rich fabric of Vermont's past.

Every fall, Vermont has a carefully regulated hunting season for bears. Biologists and wardens use research, laws, and regulations

to ensure that hunting will help maintain a healthy bear population. Like the original Native Americans, modern-day hunters use the entire animal—meat, pelt, organs and bones—out of respect for the bear and the tradition of hunting. Aldo Leopold speaks for them when he says,

"There is value in any experience that reminds us of our dependency on the wild—just as food—our food chain..."

Whether they are alone in the forest, viewed through a chance sighting, or hunted in the timeless tradition of obtaining food from the land, Vermont's bears provide a vital connection with our natural and wild heritage.



- *Pet food.*
- *Bird feeders.*
- *Berberis grills.*
- *Garbage.*
- *Household trash containers.*
- *Open dumpsters.*
- *Compost with accessible food and food waste.*

Here's what you can do to keep from attracting bears out of their forest habitat:



Keeping A Place for Bears In Vermont's Future.

