

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Hunting in Louisiana Black Bear Habitat



*All photos credit USFWS/Matthew McCollister*

*Several National Wildlife Refuges in Louisiana are involved in the Louisiana Black Bear recovery effort, including Tensas River NWR, Bayou Cocodrie NWR, Lake Ophelia NWR, and Bayou Teche NWR. When hunting on these refuges you should be aware of how to prevent an encounter with a bear, how to respond if you do encounter one, and what items may be useful if you are involved in a bear conflict. As the number of Louisiana Black Bears increase, hunters should be prepared to respond appropriately when encountering a bear in the woods.*

### Basic Black Bear Facts

The Louisiana Black Bear is federally protected, with a threatened status under the Endangered Species Act.

Adult bears in Louisiana can range from 100 to over 400 pounds.

Bears den in trees or on the ground from December through April; these animals can be aroused if disturbed.

Bears are typically shy and will run from humans; however, they can be defensive particularly with cubs or if harassed.

Bears have moderate sight, good hearing, and an excellent sense of smell.

Bears will often make woofing sounds or pop their jaws to show that they are becoming defensive.



### Expectations

When you are hunting in black bear habitat, **expect to see bears**. As bear populations increase, bear sightings and encounters will become more common.

**Be prepared**; we encourage you to be proactive when in the woods by carrying one of the deterrents that we recommend below.

**Don't panic**, don't run; if you have a bear encounter the safest thing to do is slowly leave the area.

### Prevention of Conflicts

Black bear conflicts in Louisiana are primarily the result of bears being attracted to a food source.

When hunting, avoid attracting bears by leaving food and other interesting scents at home or sealed in your vehicle.

Be careful about where you discard animal parts, gut piles, etc. Do not field dress an animal where you plan to hunt the next day. Never leave garbage in the woods or at campsites.

Do not leave personal items unattended in the woods. If you must leave belongings (clothes, bags, back packs, **ATV seat cushions**, tree stands, etc.), hang them from a tree with rope. Items should be high enough off the ground and far enough from the tree that a bear cannot reach them.

### Potential Conflict Situations

There are a variety of ways that you may encounter a bear while hunting, most are a result of a bear being curious or an accident. Here are some recommendations on how to behave in a few of these situations.

- If you walk up on a bear in the woods and it does not run away; don't panic, don't run, slowly leave the area.
- If a bear puts its feet on your tree stand; yell and wave your arms.



Most bears look up at a tree stand because they smell where a person or a person's food has been, but often do not see the hunter at first.

■ If you encounter a bear that is being overly curious or bold, make lots of noise and throw objects (rocks, sticks) at it; if necessary use one of the recommended deterrents below.

- If you kill a deer and a bear will not leave the carcass after you have made yourself known, you may want to try one of the recommended deterrents below. **It is illegal for a hunter to shoot a Louisiana Black Bear because it is scavenging a harvested animal.**
- If you are attacked by a Louisiana Black Bear, defend yourself - **do not play dead.**

## Products

The following types of deterrents can be useful to hunters in black bear habitat; these products should all be handled responsibly and according to manufacturer directions:

**Air horns** - these small, loud noise makers can be used to scare bears that are being curious.

**Bear spray** - this type of pepper spray is extremely effective at deterring problem bears. Bear spray comes from a variety of manufacturers and is available from several hunting, outdoor, and sporting good stores. Bear spray is compact, and can be carried easily on a belt or in a hunting bag. Bear spray could be used if a bear is persistent about

following a hunter, refuses to leave a harvested animal, is destroying personal property, or poses a human safety risk. Bear spray is not the same as self defense spray that is intended for humans. Bear spray is not lethal and has a limited range. When using this deterrent, keep in mind that the wind will affect the range and direction of the spray, you do not want to expose yourself to it.

When using any one of these deterrents remember that **you are responsible** for using it safely. Keep it with you when hunting (bear spray in the truck doesn't help you in the woods) and account for the wind when using bear spray.

### *Deterrents\**

Counter Assault Bear Spray  
[www.counterassault.com](http://www.counterassault.com)

Guard Alaska Bear Spray  
[www.guardalaska.com](http://www.guardalaska.com)

Pepper Power Bear Spray  
[www.pepperpower.com](http://www.pepperpower.com)

Frontiersman Bear Spray  
[www.sabre-sabered.com](http://www.sabre-sabered.com)

*Retailers that sell deterrents\**  
[www.basspro.com/](http://www.basspro.com/)

[www.cabelas.com/](http://www.cabelas.com/)

[www.rei.com/](http://www.rei.com/)

*Other useful resources*  
[www.centerforwildlifeinformation.org/](http://www.centerforwildlifeinformation.org/)  
a useful website for bear/human conflict information

[www.bbcc.org/](http://www.bbcc.org/)

[www.lwwf.org/](http://www.lwwf.org/)

[www.lsuagcenter.com/](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/)

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**1 800/344 WILD**  
<http://southeast.fws.gov>

