



BearWise Meets
the Growing Need
for Consistent
Information on
Living
Responsibly with
Black Bears

Innovative BearWise Initiative Expands Across America

If you think black bears are in the news more often these days, you're right. Because today, most Americans live in, recreate in or travel to bear country.

Black bears once roamed from coast to coast throughout all of North America's forested lands. But when European settlers arrived and began turning forests into farmlands and settlements, bears were seen as a threat to people and livestock.

Available bear habitat dwindled and bear numbers plummeted.

Coexisting with wildlife was a concept that was still many decades away.

Black bears survived in remote pockets of wilderness by being remarkably intelligent, resourceful and adaptable. Today, thanks to new attitudes and decades of enlightened conservation and management efforts, black bears have made a dramatic comeback over much of their historic home range and are returning to many places where they haven't been seen in decades.

There are once again established bear populations in at least 40 states and frequent sightings in several more. The growing human population of the US has also become increasingly



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“BearWise offers a wealth of useful information and smart solutions that help homeowners, businesses and communities coexist with bears,” said Curt Melcher, Director of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and President of the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies. “This program delivers information people can understand and trust, and resources and tools people can use with confidence. The Association is proud to be part of such an impressive program.”

mobile; the Census Bureau reports that the average American moves more than 11 times over their lifetime and regularly travels to other states. Fewer than one in ten people have never left the state where they were born.

Spending time outdoors and in our parks and forests has never been more popular. In 2021, 164.2 million people or 54% of Americans ages 6 and over participated in outdoor recreation at least once. That was the highest number of participants on record. According to the [2022 Outdoor Participation Trends Report](#) from the Outdoor Foundation more than 58 million people went hiking, 46 million camped and more than 10

million people went backpacking.

More than 15 million people visit the Tahoe Basin, which straddles Nevada and California, every year. “In the Tahoe Basin, growing numbers of both bears and humans are leading to an increase in human-bear encounters and conflicts,” said Nevada Department of Wildlife bear biologist Carl Lackey. “Bears pay no attention to boundaries and have no idea when they cross from public to private lands or from one state to another; that’s why a North American program with consistent messaging that can be used by anyone who lives, works, recreates and travels wherever bears also live makes so much sense.”

BearWise



The combination of more people in bear country and more bears living in closer proximity to people creates more potential for human-bear interactions and conflicts. The need for a trusted nationwide resource that provides scientifically sound information about how to live responsibly with bears and avoid causing conflicts has never been greater.

"It's not enough for a state wildlife agency to just educate people about bears. We need them to take action. BearWise provides many resources that help people prevent conflicts around their homes and communities as well as when they're spending time outdoors in bear country. Agencies also benefit when visitors from BearWise states travel and bring their knowledge with them. Being BearWise is a way of life," said Dan Gibbs, Black Bear Program Leader for the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and the Committee Chair for the BearWise program.

The work to create a program that would deliver a consistent message about living responsibly with bears no matter where someone lived, played or traveled began with a dedicated group of state agency bear biologists in the Southeast. With the support of the Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA), they worked together to create BearWise.





BearWise

The BearWise website debuted in mid-2018 and quickly became one of the most widely-used sources for science-based information, useful resources and practical tools that help people live more responsibly with black bears. Soon states outside the Southeast wanted to join BearWise.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) believes strongly in the BearWise mission and wanted every state to have the opportunity to become part of this innovative new program. In late 2022, BearWise became a non-profit, North American program under the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) and quickly expanded across the country.



BearWise is dedicated to helping people live responsibly with black bears. Being BearWise helps keep people, pets, animals and property safe and bears wild.

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The BearWise website makes it easy to find in-depth information on what everyone can do to prevent human-caused conflicts with bears at home and outdoors.

The [BearWise store](#) offers a wide variety of free bulletins and fact sheets, useful tools like banners, doorhangers, stickers, and signage, and fun BearWise stuff for kids and adults.

Over the past two hundred plus years, America's black bears have proven themselves to be remarkably intelligent, resourceful and adaptable. Now it's up to people to adopt habits and lifestyles that will help us safely and responsibly share the landscape with bears for many years to come.

Check out these useful downloadable resources, and MORE, at the **BearWise® online store!**

The collage features several BearWise resources:

- BEARWISE CHECKLIST:** A circular checklist with icons for various topics like Fruit Trees, Gardens, Compost, Chickens, Farm Animals, Homes, Outbuildings, Trash, Recycling, Feeding Birds, Feeding Pets, Straps, BBO Grills, Smokers, Vehicles Parked Outside, and How BearWise Are You?
- BearWise® BULLETIN #1:** A bulletin titled "Attract Birds, Not Bears" with a bear illustration and text about bird feeding and bear attraction.
- BearWise Vacation Tips:** A page titled "BearWise Vacation Tips" with a bear illustration and sections on "Don't Feed the Bears", "Discourage Break-ins", "Bear Viewing Guidelines", "If You See a Bear", "In the Woods", and "Driving in Bear Country".

Visit <https://bearwise.org/bearwise-store>

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For more information and materials and to sign up for email alerts, visit www.bearwise.org.

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The BearWise program is managed by a team of North American bear biologists and communications professionals and supported by the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies and the BearWise member state wildlife agencies. www.fishwildlife.org/afwa-inspires/bearwise-program

