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FALL ACTIVITY FOR BEARS BEGINS; RESIDENTS IN "BEAR COUNTRY" URGED TO SECURE TRASH AND OTHER RESIDENTIAL FOOD SOURCES

(12/P118) TRENTON - The Department of Environmental Protection is advising residents and outdoor enthusiasts in New Jersey's "bear country" that black bears are preparing for winter and are now actively foraging for food as they prepare for the denning season. The DEP urges residents to strictly adhere to guidelines for eliminating or securing potential black bear food sources to reduce potential problem encounters with bears this fall, said Commissioner Bob Martin.

"Black bears are preparing to den up for the winter season and need to consume large amounts of food in the fall," said David Chanda, Director of the DEP's Division of Fish and Wildlife. "If you live in areas frequented by bears, try to ensure they will not find food near your homes, as bears will naturally take advantage of easy meals by searching through unsecured garbage cans and dumpsters, or raiding bird feeders."

Feeding bears either deliberately or unintentionally by carelessly leaving out food or garbage can have serious consequences. Bears that learn to associate food with people readily become a nuisance and are more likely to damage property or exhibit aggression, which may lead to the bear's destruction in order to protect the public.

"Property owners, hikers and campers can reduce the likelihood of attracting bears if they diligently bear-proof residences and camps by removing or properly securing any potential bear food," said Chanda. "It is also critically important for people to never feed black bears. Feeding bears is dangerous, illegal, and may result in bears becoming aggressive."

Most of New Jersey's black bears live in the northwest portion of the state, particularly Morris, Sussex, Warren and northern Passaic counties, and portions of Hunterdon, Somerset, and Bergen counties. However, as the bear population in New Jersey has grown in recent years, black bears have been sighted in all 21 counties, and bear-human encounters have occurred more frequently in places outside of traditional bear country, including more heavily populated suburban areas of the state.

To deal with this issue, a New Jersey Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy was developed by the state's Fish and Game Council and approved by Commissioner Martin. That policy emphasizes managing black bears through research and monitoring, non-lethal and lethal control of problem bears, public education on co-existing with bears-including trash management, and includes an annual controlled hunt.

Reducing conflicts with bears is a community effort. It only takes several households with unsecured food to create a nuisance bear that could affect an entire neighborhood.

These simple rules for living in bear country will help minimize conflicts with black bears:

- * Invest in bear-proof garbage containers. If not using bear-proof garbage containers, store all garbage in containers with tight fitting lids in a secure area such as a basement, the inside wall of a garage, or a shed.
- * Use electric fencing to protect livestock and beehives.
- * Put garbage out on collection day, not the evening before.
- * Wash garbage containers with a disinfectant at least once a week to eliminate odors. Draping ammonia or bleach soaked cloth over containers will help to eliminate odors.
- * Do not place meat or sweet food scraps in compost piles.
- * Feed birds only from December 1 to April 1, when bears are least active.
- * If you feed birds when bears are active, suspend birdfeeders at least 10 feet off the ground.
- * Clean up spilled seeds and shells daily.
- * Feed outdoor pets during daylight hours only. Immediately remove all food scraps and bowls after feeding.
- * Clean outdoor grills thoroughly after each use. Grease and food residue can attract bears.
- * Do not leave food unattended while camping or picnicking.
- * Store all food items in coolers inside vehicles where they cannot be seen or in bear-proof food storage lockers at State Park facilities.
- * Never feed a black bear. It is dangerous and against the law.

Report bear damage or nuisance behavior to your local police department or to the Division of Fish and Wildlife at (877) 927-6337.

To learn more about New Jersey's black bears, visit <http://www.njfishandwildlife.com/bearfacts.htm>

To read the State's Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy, visit <http://www.nj.gov/dep/fgw/bearpolicy10.htm>

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