

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources, Region 5

Bureau of Wildlife

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Denise M. Sheehan
Acting
Commissioner

September 12, 2005

Dear Outdoor Recreational User Groups & Information Providers:

RE: Mandatory Bear-Resistant Canisters in the Eastern High Peaks Wilderness

This letter is a follow-up to an earlier letter in which the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (Department) stated its intent to work toward implementation of a regulation that would require the use of bear resistant canisters in the Eastern High Peaks Wilderness area. The necessary public review and comment period on this regulation has now been completed and the Department has officially adopted a regulation requiring overnight users in the Eastern Zone of the High Peaks Wilderness Area to use bear resistant canisters for the storage of food, toiletries, and garbage during the period of April 1 through November 30. The regulation became effective on August 24, 2005.

Negative interactions between black bears and humans, mainly related to bears stealing food from humans and damaging camper's equipment in the effort to obtain food, had been a fairly common occurrence in the Adirondack High Peaks for at least twenty-five years. In recent years, the number and severity of these interactions had been raised to a sustained level that was no longer acceptable, with significant concerns for human health and safety being raised.

After considerable research, the Department determined that a regulation requiring the use of bear-resistant canisters was the only reasonable and effective means to break bears' association of camper's supplies and equipment as a source of food. The mandatory use of canisters in the Eastern High Peaks, an area of very high recreational use, will minimize negative human/bear encounters, leading to more enjoyable experiences for users, and a safer environment for users and bears.

The Department continues to educate overnight campers about the importance of following the regulation, and the rationale supporting it. We would be very appreciative if you could assist the Department with this education effort by informing your members and/or clients of the regulation and the reasons behind it. Two fact sheets - Backcountry Bears and Bear-Resistant Canisters - are attached to help you provide accurate information.

Additional information on bears, avoiding problems with bears, bear-resistant canisters and the bear-resistant canister regulation - including downloadable fact sheets in English and French - may be found at: www.dec.state.ny.us/website/reg5/r5bears.html

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Kenneth L. Kogut
Regional Wildlife Manager

Attachments



Black Bear Fact Sheet for Backcountry Users

Facts About Black Bears

- **Bears are Common in the Adirondacks and Catskills** - The Adirondack Region contains the largest black bear population in New York (5,000-6,000) and the Catskill Region contains the second largest (500-600). The Allegheny Region contains 100-200 bears. You are very likely to encounter a bear while camping in the backcountry of these regions.
- **Bears are Intelligent and Curious** - They spend a great deal of time exploring for food, and this can bring them close to humans. If an activity results in food, they will repeat that activity.
- **Feeding Bears *Will* Cause Trouble for Humans and Bears** - When bears learn to obtain food from humans, they become bold and aggressive. Bear's natural foraging habits and behavior are changed. Usually solitary, bears can be concentrated in areas causing stress, injuries from physical conflicts, and the spread of diseases. When feeding from human sources, bears will often eat unhealthy materials such as soap, shaving cream, insect repellent, food packaging, etc.

DO NOT FEED BEARS (INTENTIONALLY or ACCIDENTALLY)

How to Avoid Attracting Bears

- **Use Bear-Resistant Canisters** - This is a highly effective means for preventing bears from getting your food, toiletries and garbage. If you have no choice but to hang your food, be sure to use a **dark-colored cord**. The cord should be 75 feet long and the bag should be hung 15 feet above the ground and at least 10 feet away from trees.

NOTE: DEC REGULATION REQUIRES THE USE OF BEAR-RESISTANT CANISTERS BY OVERNIGHT USERS IN THE EASTERN HIGH PEAKS WILDERNESS BETWEEN APRIL 1 AND NOVEMBER 30.

- **Pack a Minimal Amount of Food and Plan Meals to Avoid Leftovers** - The less food to store, the better. Use lightweight and dehydrated foods. Eat all that you cook.
- **Cook Before 5 p.m., Away From Your Campsite and Be Clean** - Bears become active after 5 p.m.; have food stored and site cleaned by then. Choose an area at least 100 feet away from your campsite. Avoid spills and drippings.
- **Keep Food in Storage Containers** - Only take out the food you plan to cook. Store food immediately if a bear approaches your cooking area.
- **Never Leave Food Unattended** - Bears often watch, hidden in woods, waiting for opportunities to steal food.

Bear Encounters

- **Never Approach or Surround a Bear** - Bears aggressively defend themselves when they feel threatened or cornered. Be especially cautious around cubs as mother bears are very protective.
- **Do Not Throw Your Backpack or Food Bag at an Approaching Bear** - This practice will only encourage bears to approach and "bully" people to get food.
- **Use Noise to Scare Bears Away** - Yell, clap or bang pots immediately upon sighting a bear near your campsite. Never run from the bear. If you feel threatened, back away slowly.
- **Avoid Walking Trails at Night** - Stay in your campsite to avoid chance encounters.

FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS OF DEC FOREST RANGERS AND CARETAKERS

More information may be found on the DEC web site www.dec.state.ny.us under "Bears" or call DEC Region 5 at (518) 897-1200.

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

George E. Pataki, Governor Denise M. Sheehan, Acting Commissioner



Bear-Resistant Canister Fact Sheet

Many black bears, particularly those in the Adirondack High Peaks Wilderness, have become adept at obtaining food that is hung by backcountry campers. Bear-resistant canisters are a highly effective means for preventing bears from obtaining food, toiletries and garbage. When bears are unable to obtain food from backcountry campers, campers will have a more enjoyable backcountry experience, and the bears will return to looking for natural foods in the forest. Canisters are required in many National Parks and resist even grizzly bears.

DEC REGULATION REQUIRES THE USE OF BEAR-RESISTANT CANISTERS BY OVERNIGHT USERS IN THE EASTERN HIGH PEAKS WILDERNESS BETWEEN APRIL 1 AND NOVEMBER 30.

Bear-Resistant Canisters

- Canisters are solid and non-pliable.
- Canisters are usually made of a hard plastic, but metal or another material may also be used.
- Non-rigid containers or sacks are not considered bear-resistant canisters under the regulation.
- Canisters weigh 3 to 5 pounds.
- Canisters typically are 8 inches by 12 inches in size.
- Canisters can hold 6 person-days of food.

Packing a Bear-Resistant Canister

- Pack all scented items (food, toiletries, and trash) in the canister.
- Pack materials in sealed plastic bags or containers to reduce odors that will attract bears.
- Choose foods that are compact, compressible and high in calories.
- Don't take more than you will need.

Using a Bear-Resistant Canister

- Ensure that the canister lid is secured.
- Carry the canister in the backpack or strap it to the outside.
- Nylon carrying cases are available for some canisters.
- Place reflective tape on the canister to assist in locating the canister in the dark.
- Label the canister with your name and contact information, in case it is lost.

Storing a Bear-Resistant Canister

- Canisters should be stored at least 100 feet away from your campsite.
- Wedge the canister between rocks, under logs or just place it in a shallow depression.
- Do NOT hang canisters; bears can still carry off your food.
- Do NOT store canisters in carrying case; bears will be able to carry it away.
- Do NOT store canisters near water; canisters are not watertight and do not float.

Benefits of Bear-Resistant Canisters (when properly used)

- Prevent the loss of food to a bear, thus preventing hungry campers and shortened camping trips.
- Reduce or eliminate the occurrence of night time visits by bears to your campsite.
- Reduce or eliminate occurrences of damage to expensive camping equipment like backpacks and tents.
- Eliminates the need to locate the proper tree for a tree hang.

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