

## Living With Wildlife

One of the benefits of rural Montana living is the abundance of wildlife and some adaptable animals, such as deer, raccoons, black bears and turkeys, can do well in the environments we create near our homes. However, while wildlife being nearby does not itself pose a problem, some issues involving public safety, property damage, wildlife health and public perceptions of wildlife arise when wildlife and people come together.

***Animals are opportunistic and will take advantage of any source of food and shelter.*** The key to living with wildlife is learning to understand them. Understanding the feeding habits, seasonal cycles, reproduction and other behavioral patterns will help you develop a strategy on coexisting with wildlife.

There has been a growth in the number of people who, in addition to feeding songbirds, also directly or indirectly feed deer, turkeys, bears, skunks, and other animals around their homes. Although we like to think we are helping wildlife by providing food, the reality is, we are encouraging wildlife to become dependent on people and upon artificial food sources. Wild animals that have been fed quickly lose their fear of humans, which may cause human-wildlife conflicts for an entire neighborhood or community. Not only is it illegal, but feeding game animals, such as deer, can also attract predators, such as mountain lions and coyotes. By inviting deer into your yard, you may also be inviting a mountain lion for a free meal.

***What to do about nuisance bears.*** If you have had a visit from a bear (grizzly or black) it is best to contact the Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks immediately after the initial incident. Reporting the incident can help prevent future visits for both you and your neighbors. There may be surrounding neighbors that are having similar problems. Reporting all bear incidents or concerns gives MFW&P an opportunity to determine the most effective way to resolve the problem or prevent one from happening.

***Preventing Conflicts.*** There are many things around our homes that can unintentionally attract wildlife and cause a conflict. Preventing conflicts between people and wildlife must be a community-wide effort to be truly

effective. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks offers these tips on preventing conflicts:

***People Food:*** Do not store refrigerators or freezers outside. Do not leave food unattended or in vehicles. Barbecue grills and smokers should be secured in a building when not in use.

***Birdfeeders:*** It is best to feed songbirds only when bears are asleep in the winter (November through March). If you must feed birds the rest of the year, hang feeders at least 10 feet high and 4 feet away from any tree or pole. Be aware black bears are excellent climbers. You can also bring feeders in at night, but bears may still be attracted to seed and hulls left on the grounds.

***Pet Food:*** If your pets are allowed in the house, feed them in the house. If they are outside pets, feed only the amount of food your pet will eat in a single feeding. Clean up any spilled or leftover food immediately and bring bowls in at night. Pet food should be stored in a secure building or bear-resistant container.



*Cow moose and her calf on Bear Creek Road.*

**Livestock:** Livestock feed should be stored in secure buildings or bear-resistant containers; leftover feed should not be left out overnight. Some livestock are vulnerable to predators. Be sure to keep all feed secured, clean up afterbirth and remove dead animals quickly. Pens, coops and corrals should be at least 50 yards from wooded areas with electrified fencing.

**Fruit Trees and Gardens:** Pick all fruit from trees as they ripen. Do not leave fruit to rot on the ground. Gardens should be harvested immediately as vegetables, herbs and flowers mature. Locate gardens away from forests and shrubs that bears may use for cover. Do not use blood meal as a fertilizer. Electric fencing is the most effective way at deterring bears.

**Trash:** Garbage should be stored inside a secure building or in a bear-resistant container. Only put garbage out

the day of pick up or haul your garbage to the landfill regularly.

**Compost Piles:** Compost piles are not generally recommended in areas where bears live. Compost should be limited to grass, leaves and garden clippings and should be turned frequently. If food scraps must be added, bury them deeply. Never add meat, oils or fats to compost. An electric fence is effective at deterring bear.

### **Assistance**

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) provides assistance with wildlife conflicts. Information on living with wildlife or preventing wildlife conflicts can be found at the MFWP website at <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/livingwildlife>. Please contact the MFWP Libby Office at (406) 293-4161 for local information and assistance.



*Bears can be very tenacious to get to the food.*