American Black Bear
Latin name: Ursus americanus

**Range**
American Black Bears are found across North America, from Northern Mexico, to more than 30 US states, to all the provinces and territories of Canada, except for Prince Edward Island.

**Appearance:**
Black bears vary a great deal in both size and color. Although black is the most common color, there can be periods of time when black bears are shades of brown. Others have white coats (Kermode bears) and one of the rarest has a pale-blue coat (glacier bears). Both of these are found in British Columbia. The size of an adult male black bear can range from 50 to 75 inches and they can anywhere from 130 to 460 pounds. Adult females are also between 50 and 75 inches tall, but weigh 90 to 175 pounds. At birth, a cub usually weighs about 7 to 11 ounces.

**Diet:**
Black bears are omnivores and will feed whatever is available: insects, nuts, berries, grasses and other vegetation, as well as meat, such as deer or moose, particularly the young. Salmon is also a common food for black bears in British Columbia. Black bears are opportunistic feeders. They will eat whatever is easiest to get and available.

**Reproduction:**
Breeding season is June, July and August, and the two bears will remain together for only a few hours or at most several days. Black bears are very solitary, except for females with cubs. The pregnancy lasts about 220 days, with cubs being born in January and February (in a maternity den). The litters range between 1 and 2 cubs, though 2 is the average. Cubs stay with their mothers for about a year and a half, so mating is limited to every two years.

**Senses**
Black bears have an exceptionally keen sense of smell and rely primarily on their nostrils to locate food and detect danger. The bear’s hearing ability is excellent while eyesight is average to poor, though they are quick to detect movement.

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**The Legend of the Black Bear**

The black bear is called the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh in the syilx̱ language. In legend times he is the Grand Chief of all the four-legget animals and is one of the four food chiefs from our legend stories. The black bear is considered a great teacher of survival and is always respected by SYILX nation. If a black bear is to be killed for whatever reason, be rough or aggressive, even then certain SYILX protocols must be followed in dealing with the dead bear. The stylized symbol of the bear track is one of the symbols used by some of the bands in the Okanagan as a sort of recognition that the user of that symbol is an Okanagan. However, it is not to be considered as the only crest or symbol for being Okanagan. – Richard Armstrong

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**Main Attractants for Bears in our Communities**

**GARBAGE**
Garbage is a major attractant that brings bears into our communities. The solution to this problem is to make sure that garbage is properly secured. Never leave garbage out overnight. Use a bear proof garbage can. Contact the RDOS at (250) 492-0237. Store garbage as securely as possible (inside the house, in a sturdy shed, freeze any pungent foods). Create less garbage by practicing the 3 Rs: recycle, reduce and reuse.

**FRUIT TREES, GRAPES & NUTS**
Fruit trees are a big attractant for bears in the South Okanagan-Similkameen. The best safety practices include: Electric fencing, removing unused fruit trees, cleaning up windfall fruit as soon as possible, harvesting fruit immediately, working with neighbors to help each other out with fruit.

**COMPOST**
Composting is good for the environment, but must be done properly so that it is not an attractant for wild animals. Do not put meat, fish, oils, milk or leftovers into compost. Rinse eggshells before composting. Turn compost regularly to keep it as dry as possible. Cover kitchen waste with soil. Construct a compost bin, rather than just having a heap.

**PEST CONTROL**
Reduce the number of pests in your yard. Keep pens and cages away from vegetation coverage. Place the hives on tall metal platforms, as bears are difficult for bears to climb. Please contact OSCA for a Bears and Agriculture Fact Sheet at (250) 492-4422 or outreach@osca.org

**BIRD FEEDERS**
Bears love bird feeders. Make sure that there are no birdseeds on the ground. Store bird feeders and seeds indoors during bear season (spring-fall). Birds do not need to be fed during bear season as there is enough natural food around. If you are having birds in your yard, plant bright flowers and use bird baths.

**PET FOOD**
Feed your pet indoors if possible. Bring pet dishes and leftovers indoors every night. Always store pet food indoors.

**BARBEQUES**
Bears can smell one hundred times better than any human, so be sure to never leave something that smells good unattended.

**AGRICULTURE**
It is important to properly protect and secure all agriculture. Use electric fencing around livestock. Animals sheep-size or smaller are at the highest risk. Keep pens and cages away from vegetation coverage. Uses electric fencing around beehives, or place the hives on tall metal platforms, as they are difficult for bears to climb. Please contact OSCA for a Bears and Agriculture Fact Sheet at (250) 492-4422 or outreach@osca.org

**Field your pet indoors if possible. Bring pet dishes and leftovers indoors every night.**

**Always store pet food indoors.**

**Barbeques**
Bears can smell one hundred times better than any human, so be sure to never leave something that smells good unattended.

**Properly clean the barbecue after every use.**

**Scrape and burn off the grill.**

**Store the barbecue covered and secure.**

**Do not leave dirty utensils, sauces or leftovers outdoors overnight.**

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**South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program**

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