

You are responsible for your safety and the safety of the bears

Bears live almost everywhere in Yukon and NWT. If you spend any amount of time hunting, moving quietly through the bush, or handling and transporting meat, chances are you will encounter a bear. Caribou hunters on the Dempster Highway are more likely to encounter a bear because of all the caribou kill sites in the area.

Bears usually avoid people or try to bluff their way out of an uncomfortable situation. Bears typically only attack when they are defending something like their family, food, or personal space. When bears encounter hunters at a hunter-killed caribou, they may try to claim the kill. Bears that receive these "food rewards" become food-conditioned and will begin associating humans with food. Food-conditioned bears can become aggressive towards humans when looking for food. Food-conditioned bears can rarely be rehabilitated and are often destroyed.

Be bear aware when hunting

Hunt in groups of two or more. Bears often avoid larger groups of people. More people also mean more eyes watching for caribou and bears, and your hunting partners can help you pack the meat out faster.

Be aware of your surroundings and watch for signs of bears along your route. If you come across fresh bear scat or tracks, leave the area immediately. Use binoculars to look for bears when you are in open areas. Be extra cautious when moving through brushy areas and at dawn and dusk when low light makes it difficult to see.

Avoid walking into the wind when you can, particularly in areas with low visibility, like dense brush. Bears ahead of you in your travel path can't smell you if the wind is blowing your scent behind you. Bears have an excellent sense of smell and if a bear smells you, it will likely leave the area well before you even know it was there.

Flocks of ravens often alert you to a possible animal carcass that may have a bear on it. Avoid these areas.

Be extra cautious when travelling along streams or rivers because bears commonly move along these areas. Some streams are loud enough that a bear might not hear you coming and you might not hear the bear.



The PCMB wishes all harvesters a safe and successful hunt

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Think safety first



Bear Safety for Caribou Hunters



Immediately remove meat from the kill site

Go to your caribou kill site right away. Approach slowly with the wind at your back and make noise so bears can hear you coming. Move the caribou to an open area as soon as possible if it went down in a brushy site or other area with limited visibility. Field dress a caribou as soon as you can after the kill. Watch for bears that may be drawn to the kill site while you are there.

Try to pack out all the meat in one trip. Plan ahead so you only shoot as many animals as you can pack out in one trip. Hunting partners are a great help for this. A toboggan will also help move the meat out quickly.

Leave the gut pile and carcass at the kill site. Again, make sure this is in an open area so that other hunters can more easily see bears feeding on the leftovers.

Making multiple trips to pack the meat out

If you must make more than one trip to pack out meat, leave the remaining meat in an open area at least 100 yards from the kill site. It's a good idea to place a stick in the gut pile and flag it at the top. Look for this flag on your way back to the kill site. If it has moved, be aware that something has disturbed the gut pile and approach cautiously — have the wind at your back and make noise. Remove the flagging tape on your last trip out.

If a bear has claimed your meat cache, do not attempt to drive the bear away. Trying to scare off a feeding bear will likely provoke an attack, plus the meat is probably already soiled.

Don't shoot a bear to retrieve hunter-killed game. This is illegal in the Yukon and discouraged in the NWT. The meat is likely already ruined anyhow. Yukon licensed hunters cannot take another caribou to replace one that a bear took unless they have a second tag.

Encountering a bear in the field

If you see a bear and it hasn't detected you, leave the area without disturbing it. Never turn and run. This may cause the bear to see you and start chasing you.

If a bear sees you or it moves toward you, help the bear identify you as human by talking calmly and waving your arms slowly above your head. Bears will often leave the area once they identify you as human. Walk away slowly while keeping an eye on the bear.

If the bear continues to move toward you, stay calm, stand beside your hunting partner to make yourselves look larger, and keep your pack on for protection if you have one. Your response to the approaching bear depends on whether it appears defensive or non-defensive.

Defensive bears will look stressed or agitated. They will be defending something — food, cubs, or their personal space. With a defensive bear, try to appear non-threatening; speak calmly; slowly retreat if the bear stops advancing; stand your ground if the bear keeps approaching; and fall on the ground and play dead if the bear attacks. Non-defensive bears will look curious and be intent on you with their head and ears up. In this case, speak in a firm voice and move out of the bear's path. Stop and stand your ground if it follows you; shout and act aggressively. Firing a rifle may frighten a bear away, but not always. The noise of a skidoo can scare away a bear that is just curious. Start the machine and rev it up. Never chase the bear with a skidoo — this harassment is illegal. If the bear attacks, fight back.

If a bear approaches you at your caribou kill site, it likely wants your caribou, not you. Talk to the bear in a firm voice and follow the advice above about this non-defensive bear.

If you need to shoot a bear

Use a firearm as a last resort for dealing with a bear. Never shoot at a bear with an underpowered firearm as you will only wound the bear, making matters worse. Firearms that are adequate for dealing with bears are 30 caliber or larger or a 12-gauge shotgun with rifled slugs.

If a bear suddenly and aggressively attacks you, use your gun to defend yourself. Aim to kill a charging bear on your first shot. Aim just below the head at the top of the chest on a grizzly — you're aiming for the heart. Do not aim for the head — head shots do not always stop a bear. Keep shooting until the bear drops. Once you have killed a bear, be aware that the blood scent in the air can attract more bears.

If you have only wounded a bear, you must make a reasonable effort to kill it if you can safely pursue it. Be aware that a wounded bear can be extremely dangerous to yourself or other people in the area.

If you have to shoot a bear, you must report it and turn in the hide and skull to wildlife authorities as soon as possible.

Remember: Do not kill a bear just because it has claimed your meat cache or it is on your gut pile. Leave it alone. It is not worth risking your own safety or that of the bear.



REPORT ANY BEAR ENCOUNTERS TO THE LOCAL WILDLIFE AUTHORITIES