

Take care of our bears

Posted Oct. 21, 2009—The Rockies are deep in the swing of the season and winter snows are on the way. For bears, that means hurry up and eat as much as possible and put on enough fat to weather the winter denning period. For landowners in grizzly and black bear country, it means be extra vigilant about bear attractants. Carrots should be out of the garden (actually, September 15th is the magic carrot cut-off date), meat should be hung in secure buildings, bird feeders should be brought in (it's best not to have them out at all, even in summer), and porches need to remain free of dog food, garbage, and other food attractants. We've all heard it before, but we'll say it again: *A fed bear is a dead bear*. Bears that have received food rewards from people also present a much greater risk to human safety.

In late September, Patti and Betsy, the North Fork's two best known management grizzlies, were busy up in the alpine huckleberry patches. Tim Manley, the grizzly bear management specialist for **Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks** (MFWP) got a good look at them from the airplane while tracking the signals from their radio collars. Manley said the two bears looked "good and fat". But now that huckleberry season is over, the siblings have been seen by landowners in the valley bottom.

If the bears wander near your house or are hanging out on the side of the road, Manley says "make them leave by yelling and banging pots and pans, or honking the horn." If they act like they don't want to move off, then the best thing you can do for them is to contact Manley right away. He can then respond quickly and apply booster aversive conditioning treatments to discourage them from hanging around people and developed areas. Patti and Betsy are still young bears, and so are prime candidates for Manley's aversive conditioning program. But consistency is essential, and landowner reports are Manley's best way to stay on top of teaching the bears the lesson that could very well save their lives and keep

them in the wild.

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