

'Too Much is Never Enough' - Bears Focused on Food

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

As the pink salmon run reaches its peak and the berries ripen across the island, a certain Kodiak resident is bound to be collecting their share of the bounty. Larry VanDaele is a wildlife biologist with Alaska Department of Fish and Game and said now is the time we start to see more and more bears around town.

"It's a great year for bear foods, natural bear foods. We've got a lot of berries this year and pinks are coming back strong so the bears have a tremendous amount of natural food," Van Daele said.. "August is when they really start getting into what we call hyperphagia, which means they're really starting to bulk up now to get ready for winter. And sightings always become more numerous in August, because of that."

He said the sightings so far have been a lot less than usual, but that doesn't mean the bears aren't out there. As usual, the Monashka and Bells Flats sides of town have had the most reports, with a sow and three cubs in Bells Flats and a young bear around Monashka. None have really caused problems, but VanDaele said that may be because Kodiak residents are being bear aware.

-- (Bear Aware 2 : 42 "It's a combination. People here in Kodiak are very savvy about being bear aware. And folks are extremely good about keeping their garbage contained. With the advent of more and more people keeping chickens around their yards, that's a bit of a concern for us, you need electric fence to keep the bears away from the chickens and their feed. The other side of the coin is that bears are pretty well behaved here in town, and around Kodiak. They have a lot of natural foods, they have a number of places they can escape or hide from people if they don't want to be seen. And almost anytime there is a bad encounter it's either because a bear was attracted to a person, or because a bear and a person surprised each other and felt they had to defend themselves.")

For those who are new to the island, or need a refresher on bear safety, VanDaele offers up these tips.

-- (Bear Aware 3 : 39 "It sounds kind of corny sometimes and maybe we overuse it but the old adage of be bear aware is really the best thing. That basically means that basically you recognize that you are in bear country. And anytime, any where on Kodiak you may run into one. And you need to be aware of that. And the other side of that is as you're aware of it you need to know how best to handle yourself. And usually the best way to handle yourself is to walk in groups, walk in open areas, and if you see a bear, don't panic. Think about what the bear needs, what it may want, and how you can get yourself out of that situation without causing disturbance to the bear or harm to yourself.")

VanDaele said there has only been one bear related death in the last 90 years, but added that close calls happen more regularly. He recommends that community members call fish and game with bear sightings, especially with the school year around the corner and the likelihood of children walking to and from bus stops increases.

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