

SWP Purpose

Much of the work conducted by GDTA workers is in forested and sometimes remote areas of the trails system. The potential to encounter wildlife is high. As the area also encompasses grazing leases for ranging cattle, these animals are also likely to be encountered. The purpose of this SWP is to decrease the potential for animal encounters and to provide guidelines for behavior during an encounter.

Scope

This SWP applies to all GDTA workers who work at camp or on the trails system.

Responsibilities

Responsibilities apply to the Trip Manager/Volunteer Lead, all workers, and the Health and Safety Committee.

It is the responsibility of the Trip Manager/Volunteer Lead to

- Discuss the risks of animal encounters to crew
- Implement the guidelines and controls within this SWP
- Reinforce to workers that any recommended controls must be applied consistently
- Ensure that any animal incident is reported and recorded **via an Incident Report**
- Communicate bear and/or cougar sightings to GDTA Safety Committee

It is the responsibility of the Workers to

- Comply with this SWP and follow manufacturers' instructions
- Ensure recommended controls are implemented and used appropriately.
- Immediately report any concerns or incidents to the Crew Lead, including bear/cougar sightings
- Use controls such as bear spray according to manufacturers' instructions and in a safe manner

It is the responsibility of the Safety Committee to

- Maintain this Safe Work Practice
- Perform periodic audits to assess that these requirements/SWP are being acted upon.
- Reinforce that recommended controls are to be implemented and used appropriately.

Hazards

Hazards from animals include bites, trampling, etc. Potential threats within the GDTA trails system include bears, cougars, moose, or other ungulates (particularly when with young and during rutting), rabid or otherwise sick animals (e.g. fox, coyote), domestic animals such as cattle, horses, or dogs. Almost all animal attacks are the result of surprise encounters.

Controls

Controls may include elimination/substitution, engineering, warnings, administrative, and/or PPE. Guidelines are presented below, grouped by animal type.

Bear

- Check the Kananaskis trail reports for any bear sightings/trail closures; reconsider the job at hand if a bear is in the area
- Volunteer workers should carry bear spray, as well as noise makers such as whistles
- Ensure that the bear spray is not expired, is easily accessible, but secured
- Bear spray should be directed towards the animal's face; be aware of wind direction, so that the spray does not blow back into your own face
- Bear spray is a last resort; do not depend on its efficacy
- In the event of an encounter, administer appropriate first aid treatment; a doctor should treat any animal bites/scratches to prevent infection and possibly test for rabies
- When working in bear country, stay aware of your surroundings
- All bears are individuals and so all bear encounters will be unique. Serious attacks are rare, but you must always be cautious and alert.
- Work together as a group
- When working in areas of dense brush/limited visibility, make noise so that the bear knows where you are and what you are
- Do not approach carcasses
- Watch for/avoid berry patches
- Watch for bear sign (scat, fresh tracks, diggings)
- Do not leave food or garbage in the area
- Never approach a wild animal
- If you see a bear, leave the area
- If you see a bear but the bear doesn't see you -
 - Don't attract attention. Leave the way you came without calling attention to yourself. Retreat slowly while keeping your eye on the bear. Never run.
 - If you must move forward, give the bear a wide berth. If you have no choice but to move forward, give the bear as much space as you can.
 - Stay quiet and alert. Even if you think you are a safe distance away from the bear, remain quiet, alert and calm. Continue watching for the bear until you reach your destination.
- If you see the bear and the bear sees you –
 - Do not run. Stay calm. Stay with your group. Assess the situation
 - Look around. If you see cubs or an animal carcass, the bear will want to protect them. If you see either, back away from them.
 - Prepare to use your bear spray.
 - Back out. Leave the area the way that you came. Keep your eye on the bear without staring at it aggressively.
 - Watch for a place to hide. As you back away, seek out a place of safety, such as a car or building.

- Speak to the bear in a soft, low voice. Let the bear know that you are human and not a prey animal.
 - Use your noisemaker and prepare to defend yourself with bear spray.
- If you encounter a bear at close range when you're on your bike –
 - Step off your bike and walk slowly away
 - Keep your bike between you and the bear
 - Do not try to outrun or out-cycle the bear
 - Leave the area the way you came if you spot a bear from a distance.
- If the encounter is a defensive one, it occurs when the bear is feeling stressed or threatened. The bear may have been surprised by your sudden appearance or feel that you are a threat to itself, its cubs, or its food source. In such an encounter, the bear may show some of the following behaviors:
 - Vocalizing such as blowing, huffing, "woofing", growling, or snapping its jaws
 - Flicking the ears back
 - Swatting the ground
 - Swaying the head
 - Making a bluff charge
- If this occurs, -
 - Do not run. Stay calm, make no sudden movements, and do not act in a threatening manner.
 - Speak to the bear in a soft, low voice. Speaking calmly to the bear lets it know that you are not a prey animal and helps to keep you calm and focused.
 - Keep the group together.
 - Prepare to use your bear spray.
 - Back away slowly without turning your back to the bear
 - If the bear charges, do not run. Stand your ground. A bear may come very close to you when making a bluff charge, and it may make more than one bluff charge. NEVER run. Remember that bluff charges are made to communicate that you've invaded the bear's space and it wants you to move off. Most of bluff charges are, in fact, bluffs, and do not end with the bear making contact. Shooting the bear out of fear in bluff situations may result in the needless death of a bear.
 - When the bear approaches, use your bear spray –
 - At 9 to 15 m (30 to 50 ft) fire a warning blast for ½ to 1 second, aiming the bear spray slightly downward.
 - At 6 to 9 m (20 to 30 ft) fire 1 to 2-second blasts in continuous succession, aiming slightly downward in front of the bear's head until the bear leaves.
 - At 0 to 6 m (0 to 20 ft) fire 1 to 2-second blasts in continuous succession, aiming at the head, or into the nose and mouth of the bear until the bear leaves.
 - Try to keep some bear spray in reserve. Always re-evaluate your situation

- After spraying the bear, back away. Keep the bear in sight as you leave the area and stay alert. Bears may be attracted to the bear spray residue.
- If the bear does make contact, play dead. Cover the back of your neck with your hands. Lie on your stomach with your legs anchored in the ground. If the bear rolls you over, roll back on to your stomach. Don't move until you're sure the bear has left the area.
- Once the bear has stopped, remain quiet. Yelling at the bear may provoke it into a further attack.
- Defensive attacks are short. If the bear has started to bite or if the attack is prolonged, it may have turned predatory (see below).
- If the bear sees you, is not showing signs of stress and is closing the distance –
 - It may be curious, looking for a handout, attempting to assert its dominance or be assessing you as a potential food source. In these cases, the bear is not showing signs of stress and is
 - Staring intently
 - Circling around you to detect your scent
 - Remaining quiet
 - Approaching in a slow, hesitant manner
 - Keeping its head and its ears up
 - In these kinds of encounters, -
 - Do not run. Prepare to fight with all means at your disposal. Do not play dead in a predatory encounter.
 - Make yourself look big and shout at the bear. Yell aggressively at the bear and stand on a rock or a tree stump to remind the bear that you are not easy prey
 - Use your noisemaker and bear spray. Continue to use your bear spray, even when in close contact with the bear.
 - Pick up rocks or sticks to use as weapons. Aim at the bear's eyes, face, and nose
 - If the bear makes contact, fight back as forcefully as you can.

Moose

- Moose are not normally aggressive. However, a moose that feels threatened, a bull moose in the fall rut, or a cow moose protecting her calves may be easily provoked into an attack.
- Calves may not always be obviously close or may be hidden from view by thick brush. Never come between a cow and its calf.
- An agitated moose may show some of the following behaviors:
 - Neck and back hairs standing up
 - Ears going back against its head
 - Snorting
 - Lip licking

- If you are charged by a moose, run away as fast as you can and try to find a car, tree or building to hide behind. If the moose knocks you down before you reach safety, don't fight - curl up into a ball and cover your head.
- To help prevent a possible confrontation, do not allow your dog to harass the moose and do not try to scare the moose off by yelling or throwing things.
- Never approach moose calves that have been left alone by their mothers. The mother may have temporarily left the calf in a safe spot and may not be too far away. Moose mothers can also be very protective. If she senses that you are too near her calf, she may defend them.

Deer

- Deer are normally timid and quick to flee when people come near. However, deer can become surprisingly aggressive in protecting themselves and their young.
- Always keep your distance from any wildlife. If it appears that the deer won't run away as you approach, walk around the deer – giving it a lot of space – or back away and find another route to your destination.
- Never approach fawns that have been temporarily left alone by their mothers. Their mothers will return, and if they see that you are too close to the fawn, they may attack.
- Collisions between vehicles and deer increase in areas with higher deer populations. These collisions can be very destructive to vehicles and each year result in human fatalities.
- Practice safe driving habits relative to wildlife – commonly deer and moose.
- Reduce speed at night
- Scan the road and ditches ahead for animals, especially when travelling at dawn or dusk.
- Slow down in a curve, when reaching the crest of a hill or in wildlife-populated areas.
- Use high beams when possible. A deer's eyes will glow when they catch light.
- Look for more than one animal – while moose are often solitary, deer travel in groups.
- Brake firmly if an animal is in the vehicle's path. Avoid swerving.
- Honk in a series of short bursts to encourage animals to move out of the way.
- Leave plenty of room when driving around an animal on or near a road – a frightened animal may run in any direction.

Cougars

- Check the Kananaskis trail reports for any cougar sightings/trail closures; reconsider the job at hand if a cougar is in the area
- Be prepared before you leave the trailhead. Discuss wildlife risks and means of controlling that risk. Make an informed plan for how the group will respond if you see a cougar.
- Travel as a group. Cougars are less likely to approach groups of people.
- Make a lot of noise to avoid surprise encounters with cougars, or other wildlife.
- Don't let anyone in the group wander off alone.
- Take your bear spray, air horn, or other noise deterrents; check that bear spray is current/not expired, and that air horn is working. Make sure you know how to use them.

- Keep your bear spray and noise deterrent on your belt or in a chest holster so you can access it quickly.
- Do not take your dogs if there is a cougar in the area; if taking your dog, make sure it is kept close and on a leash at all times.
- Ensure that you have means of communicating for assistance – e.g. cell phone, if there is cell reception; Garmin InReach device; satellite phone.
- Be alert. Always watch for wildlife behind and ahead of you.
- Be extra wary along tree lines, rock outcroppings or under ledges.
- Watch for wildlife and signs (see photos below). Signs that a cougar has recently been in the area include:
 - Tracks, scrapes and fresh kills. Cougars will bury their kills, and the buried kill may be difficult to spot. If you see part of an animal beneath a pile of leaves and grasses, assume you have located a cougar kill and leave the area.
 - Flocks of ravens or magpies may indicate a kill site where either cougars or bears could be found feeding

Cougar Signs

Cougar track in mud

Buried Kill

Cougar scat (feces) with tracks



Training

Workers must be adequately trained. Wildlife awareness training for crew leads is recommended, including guidelines for safe use of bear spray. If a worker is involved in an accident, training should be reviewed.

Ensure that there are first aiders with the crew, appropriate to the size of the crew.

Resources, References, Definitions

Staying Safe in Bear Country, training/educational video

Revision History

<u>Revision</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Description of Change</u>	<u>Personnel Involved</u>
REV 0	Feb 2020	New SWP	D Yanchula
Rev 1	Feb 2023	Changes in BOLD	D Yanchula