



BearWise® Communication Guide

How to Write, Talk (and Think) BearWise

You have the power to help everyone understand how and why people (often unintentionally) cause most human-bear conflicts. And even more importantly, how living BearWise can prevent them. Thank you for putting the power of communication to work for people and bears.



About BearWise

BearWise is the national program of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) dedicated to helping people live more responsibly with bears.

Why Trust BearWise?

The BearWise program is funded and supported by state wildlife agencies and actively managed by a national team of state agency bear biologists, bear managers and outreach and education specialists, and a communications team from the private sector.

Sound Science, Real World Solutions

The BearWise team works together to ensure that BearWise content, messaging and materials reflect both sound science and the everyday realities of living, working and recreating in bear country.



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Let's Talk Bears

Much of what people know about bears comes from something they read, watched or heard. The digital world we live in makes all that information (and misinformation) instantly accessible and much easier to share.

continued

Consequences of Attracting Bears to Homes & Communities

Bears instinctively avoid people, but easy access to unsecured garbage, bird feeders, pet food, backyard chickens, livestock and feed, fruit trees and other human-provided food sources teaches bears that neighborhoods and communities provide a more dependable source of easier, higher calorie meals than foraging in the wild.

In the wild, bears work hard to find natural foods. When bears use their amazing sense of smell, great memories and impressive strength to forage in communities, they can become destructive, aggressive and potentially dangerous. These bears often pay for accepting our invitation to dinner with their lives.

Bears Are Not Furry People

Avoid anthropomorphizing. Describing bears as if they have human personalities, characteristics and motivations causes people to believe bears think, behave and respond as they would. This is not true and can lead to potentially dangerous human behavior, such as offering food, encouraging bears to hang around the backyard, helping “orphaned” cubs, and even approaching bears to take a selfie.

Don't Blame the Bear

Describing the consequence of attracting bears as “bear problems” lets people off the hook. Most human-bear conflicts are due to intentional or unintentional human actions, habits and practices.

When you tell people they have a “bear problem” or “nuisance bear,” they naturally blame the bear and then expect a wildlife agency to make their “problem” go away.

SEE NEXT PAGE for Terminology Recommendations

The Power of Responsible Communication

Bears are Always Newsworthy

Bears are highly complex, intelligent and fascinating animals that play a vital role in the natural world. [Learn About Bears](#)

People are always fascinated by bears. Our [timely articles and monthly features](#) on bear behavior and what bears are up to are highly popular and widely shared.

Help People Be Bear-Prepared

Don't wait until there's an issue. Regularly writing about bear behavior, what attracts bears, and how to prevent conflicts fosters understanding and provides information that can help keep people and communities safe and bears wild.

Count on BearWise for reliable facts, [practical resources \(free downloads\)](#), seasonal and evergreen ideas, articles you can reprint or excerpt, and ready-to-use information on [BearWise.org](#).

“Bearanoia” is Contagious

Encounters and incidents often produce widespread media coverage. Local incidents can quickly become national news.

Nothing spreads “Bearanoia” faster than misinformation. When you choose your words wisely, you spread facts, not fear, and help people understand what happened, and if and how it might have been prevented.

Focusing on facts and avoiding sensationalism helps people and bears.

Fact Check

Press releases from wildlife agencies have been thoroughly reviewed for accuracy. Rewording can (unintentionally) distort the facts and change the meaning. Quote directly, or contact the agency if you need more information.

Terms to Avoid

Bear problems Problem bear Nuisance bear Garbage bear Conflict bear Roadkill bear	<p>All of these commonly used terms position the bear as the cause of the issue and/or diminish the value of bears.</p> <p>Professionals throughout the bear management and scientific communities have urged members to stop using these terms.</p>
Beasts Creatures	<p>These popular terms conjure up terrifying monsters or bloodthirsty killing machines purposefully stalking people and pets. Bears are neither.</p>

Terms to Use Wisely

Attacked Attacks	<p>True offensive attacks and predatory bear behavior are both distinctive and exceedingly rare. A bear that is suddenly surprised by people, harassed or cornered by people’s pets, or is defending food, cubs or itself may fight back against what it perceives as a threat. The majority of injuries to people and pets result from this instinctive defensive response by the bear. Learn About Encounters</p> <p>The “attack” word itself is emotionally charged and inherently implies aggression. Attack should never be used to describe a defensive response by the bear.</p>
Predators	<p>While bears are technically carnivores, they are typically classified as omnivores. A bear’s natural diet is 70%–85% plant-based (berries, fruits, nuts, seeds, tender plants and grasses); the rest is insects, small mammals and carrion. Bears are very opportunistic and will take small livestock (i.e. chickens, sheep, goats) and newborn deer, elk and moose.</p>

Describe the Situation, Not the Bear

Use simple, accurate terms to explain what actually happened.	<p><i>For example: “The dog chased and cornered a bear. The dog’s owner was injured trying to rescue it.”</i></p>
<p>BearWise recommends these terms and phrases to encourage understanding and help prevent conflicts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Human-bear conflicts ● Conflicts with bears OR Human-caused conflicts with bears ● Bears involved in human-caused conflicts ● Encounters / interactions with bears ● Interactions / incidents involving bears and people, pets, property ● Incidents resulting in physical contact / injury ● Bear-vehicle mortality / bear killed or injured in a collision

Using BearWise as Your Resource: [BearWise.org](https://www.bearwise.org)

BearWise offers the resources you need to provide attention-getting, fact-filled information about bears, bear behavior, preventing conflicts and responding to encounters, and the everyday realities of living responsibly with the wild neighbors.

How to Refer to BearWise	Using BearWise Content
<p>BearWise is one word, with a capital B and W.</p> <p>The BearWise brand name should not be altered. BearWise is not an organization or group. Misuse makes BearWise seem like just a clever play on words rather than a national program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No quotation marks (“BearWise”)• Never in possessive form (BearWise’s)• Do not use lowercase (bearwise or Bearwise)• Not hyphenated (Bear-Wise) <p>The registered trademark symbol ® is required with the first or primary use of BearWise in any printed or digital materials or messaging (press releases, newsletters, blogs, etc).</p>	<p>BearWise outreach materials may be reproduced as is and articles/content (not images) may be quoted for editorial use and cited as source material (“according to BearWise”).</p> <p>BearWise content is NOT in the public domain and may not be modified or used for any other reasons without written permission.</p> <p>Avoid words that refer to other programs, including bear aware and bear smart, when using BearWise information or content.</p> <p>Please notify us where BearWise content will be used so we can share your work with our member states and subscribers in BearWise in the News.</p>

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- Follow us on [Facebook.com/BearWise.org](https://www.facebook.com/BearWise.org) and [Instagram.com/bebearwise/](https://www.instagram.com/bebearwise/)

Interviews, Experts, Research Our website with an extensive article bank and printable fact sheets provides a wealth of scientifically sound, vetted information. We can also connect you with a network of state and national bear experts.

Questions? Contact Linda Masterson media@bearwise.org

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BearWise.org

Questions about state-specific bear management, incident responses, policies or regulations?

Contact the state wildlife agency directly. BearWise does not comment on or endorse specific state, federal or tribal policies, management decisions or rules or regulations, including population management, hunting, baiting, relocation, translocation, rehabilitation and lethal removal. Contact [member state wildlife agencies](#).