



2011 Brown and Black Bear Activity Summary

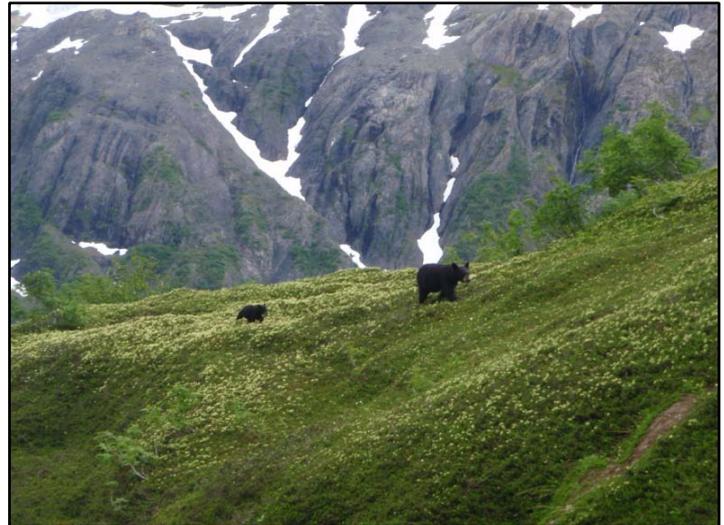
General Overview

At Kenai Fjords National Park, we define bear-human interactions as situations when bears and humans are mutually aware of each other, and we classify each interaction as either encounters or incidents. Bear-human encounters include all cases of bears responding to the presence of humans with indifference, curiosity, avoidance, stress, or surprise that do not result in a charge, property damage, or physical contact. Bear-human incidents are bear-human interactions involving damage or loss of property, garbage or food, unusual behavior on the part of the bear, charges, physical contact, and extreme evasive action in response to a bear (such as bear pepper spray or firearm use).

Staff and visitors reported 24 bear-human interactions in 2011, all of which involved black bears (*Ursus americanus*). None of the interactions recorded involved injury to humans; however, a visitor did injure a black bear. The greatest number of bear-human interactions occurred in July ($n=8$) and June ($n=8$), followed by August ($n=3$), September ($n=1$) and May ($n=1$). The majority of bear-human interactions occurred in the Exit Glacier area ($n=20$). Eleven interactions occurred on the lower trails at Exit Glacier, 11 interactions occurred on the Harding Icefield Trail, one interaction occurred in the Exit Glacier campground, and one interaction occurred on the coast. We classified 19 of the bear-human interactions as encounters and five as incidents.

In addition to reports of bear-human interactions, notable (e.g. brown bear or sow with cubs of the year) or unusual bear sightings (e.g. injured bear) are also documented. A bear sighting or observation occurs when a person sees a bear, but the bear is apparently unaware of the person. While a bear-human interaction is documented on a Bear-Human Interaction (BHIM) form, a bear observation is recorded on a Natural History Field Observation form.

In 2011, park staff and visitors documented 13 notable black bear observations and 10 brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) observations for a total of 22 notable bear observations. An additional 15 black bears were documented.



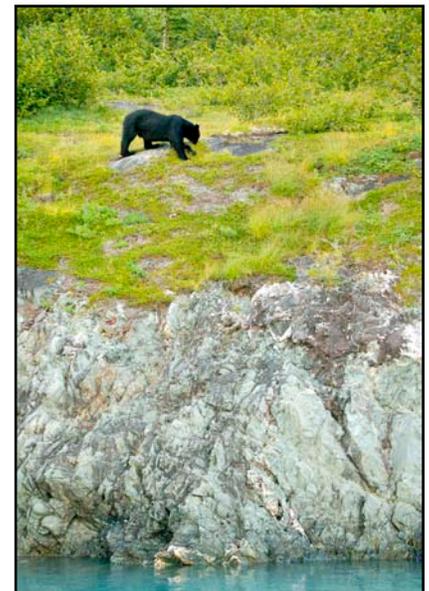
Black bear sow with cub observed near the Harding Icefield Trail

Bear Observations

Park staff and visitors observed 14 black bears with cubs in the Exit Glacier area. One black bear sow had three cubs with her. Park biologists observed one black bear above a glaucous-winged gull colony on Granite Island in Harris Bay

Six of the eight observed brown bears had cubs and were seen in the Exit Glacier area during May and June.

Staff observed one adult brown bear on the coast near James Lagoon Beach in May and another adult brown bear near Beauty Bay in July.



Black bear on the coast of Kenai Fjords.

This Black and Brown Bear Activity Summary was prepared by Leslie Adams. We wish to thank all park staff and visitors who contributed observations, BHIMS reports, and photos this year.

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Bear-Human Encounters

Park staff and visitors documented 19 bear-human encounters in KEFJ in 2011. All encounters occurred at Exit Glacier. Most of the encounters resulted from either a tolerant or habituated bear ($n=7$) or from a human surprising a bear ($n=6$).

Habituation is the waning of an animal's flight response following repeated exposure to inconsequential stimuli and results in the loss of avoidance or escape responses. The outcome of such encounters was either the displacement of humans (i.e. hikers getting off of a trail to let a bear pass) or eventual avoidance by the bear. In one case, a non-aggressive bear walked within 10 ft. of a hiker on the Harding Icefield Trail before moving off the trail.

Four of the surprised bears immediately fled from the humans, including a sow and her cubs. One bear fled after the human hazed it by yelling. In another instance, a female nursing cubs was surprised, lifted her head, but did not flee.

Three sows with cubs exhibited stress in the presence of humans by huffing and

KEFJ Bear-Human Encounters in 2011

Probable Cause	Number of Encounters
Habituated/Tolerant	7
Curious	2
Defense of Cubs	4
Surprise Encounter	6



A habituated black bear exits the trail after it travels within 10 ft. of a group of hikers on the Harding Icefield Trail.

swatting the ground but did not approach humans nor retreat from them.

Two curious bears approached humans in a non-aggressive manner. Both bears eventually avoided the humans and resumed their activities of foraging and traveling.

Bear-Human Incidents

KEFJ park visitors reported five bear-human incidents in 2011. Two incidents occurred on the Harding Icefield Trail, one incident occurred in the Exit Glacier developed area on a paved trail, one in the Exit Glacier campground, and one occurred on the coast.

On the Harding Icefield Trail, one incident occurred when a solo hiker inadvertently walked between a black bear sow and her two cubs that were in trees. The sow popped her jaws and charged the hiker from a distance of 50 meters to 30 meters.

KEFJ Bear-Human Incidents in 2011

Probable Cause	Number of Incidents
Habituated/Tolerant	1
Defense of Cubs	1
Abandoned Food	1
Surprise Encounter	1
Curious/Unknown Attraction	1

The hiker backed up the trail and waited 20 minutes and then attempted to descend the trail again. The sow charged a second time, again to within 30 meters of the hiker. After waiting another 20 minutes, the hiker successfully descended the trail without further encountering the sow and cubs.

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The second incident that occurred on the Harding Icefield Trail involved a habituated bear that travelled towards two hikers beyond their comfort level. After trying to haze the bear by yelling, clapping, and waving their arms, one of the hikers discharged their firearm towards the bear with the intent to kill. After being shot, the bear ran down and then exited the trail. The hikers continued down the trail without further encountering the bear (see box below for details regarding the follow-up to this incident).

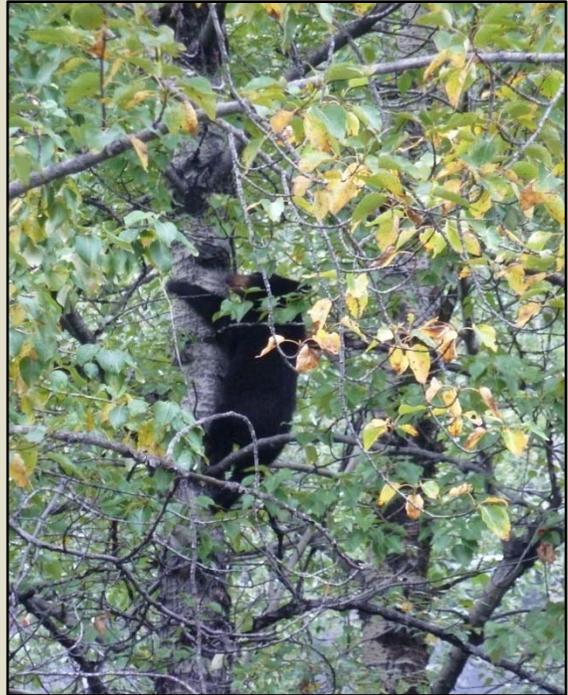
The third incident occurred near the 1951 sign on the paved trail in the Exit Glacier area. Two incongruous reports describe a surprised bear charging and/or growling. In either case, both reports document that the bear ultimately ran away after being yelled at by visitors.

The fourth incident took place in the parking lot of the Exit Glacier campground. In the middle of the night, a presumed black bear damaged two motorcycles. One motorcycle was knocked over and the second bike received damage to its seat. Saliva, claw marks, and bear prints were observed on and near the bikes.

A commercial kayak guide reported the fifth incident after hearing a conversation on a landing craft while traveling from Aialik Bay to Seward. Allegedly, a bear went through a tent wall to retrieve food from an unattended camp at Quick-sand Beach in Aialik Bay.

Bear Incident Response Team 2011 Activity

The KEFJ Bear Incident Response Team responded to one incident during the 2011 season. On August 17th, two hikers entered the Nature Center at Exit Glacier and reported that they had shot a black bear on the Harding Icefield Trail (HIT). A search for the bear was conducted by state law enforcement personnel and U.S. Park Rangers that evening but dusk precluded a complete search. The next morning, members of the Bear Incident Response Team conducted another search and followed a blood trail as far as possible but no bear was found. Visitors to the park were made aware of the incident through park staff at the Nature Center in addition to signage at the Harding Icefield Trailhead that cautioned visitors of a potentially injured bear in the area.



A cub of the year reacts to the presence of park visitors by climbing a tree near the Nature Center at Exit Glacier.



An unattended tent with food inside is damaged by a bear on Quicksand Beach in Aialik Bay.



A motorcycle seat destroyed by a presumed black bear in the parking lot of the Exit Glacier