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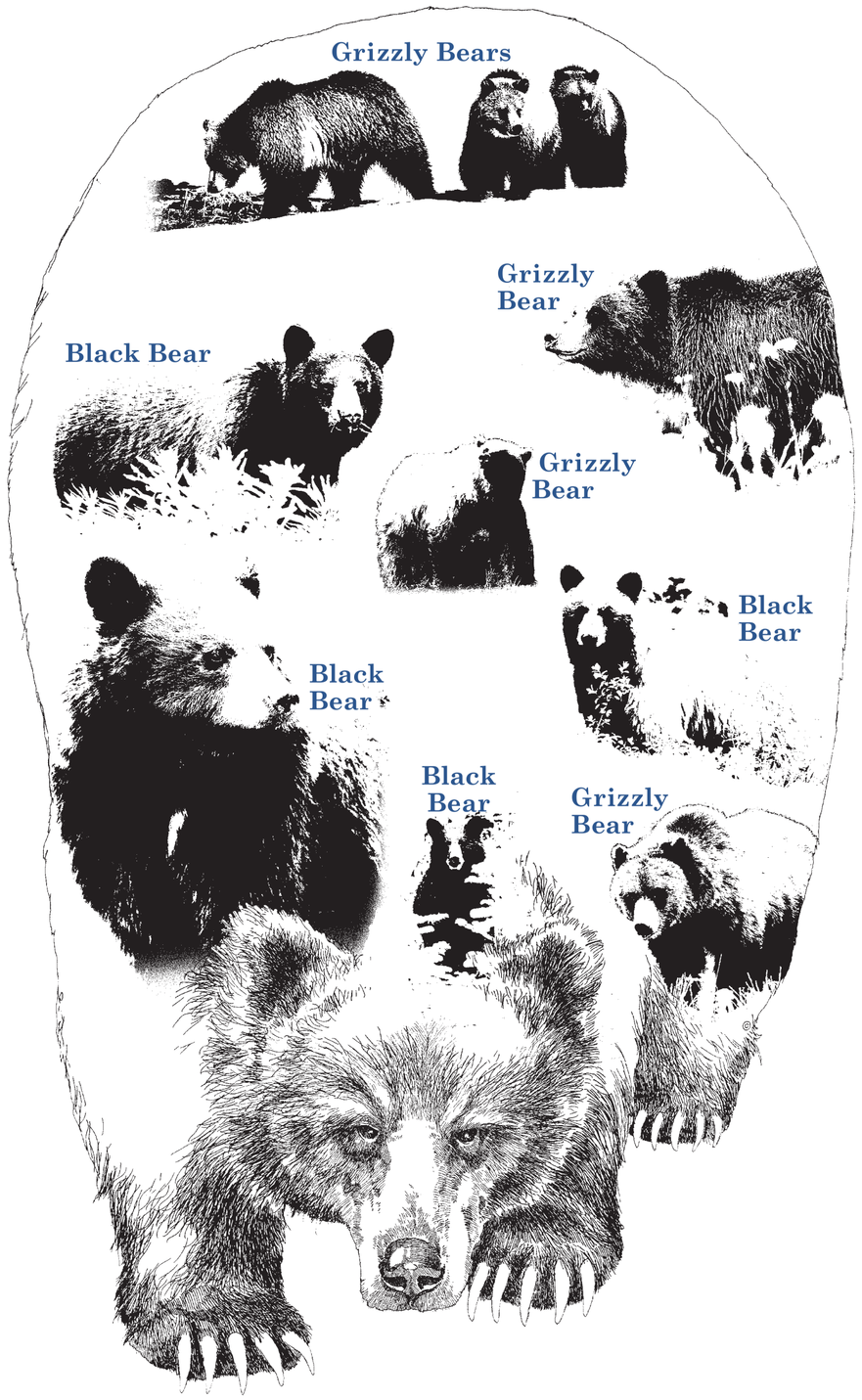
# BEARS OF THE ROCKIES

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Bear Trust International




## MEET THE BEARS

### Black Bears

Black bears are primarily a forest animal, which helps explain a mother black bear's behavior when defending her young. When threatened, the cubs will climb trees while the mother runs a short distance or climbs another nearby tree. The female black bear is less aggressive than a female grizzly when it comes to protecting her young.

The name "black bear" can be misleading. Although about six out of ten black bears are black, the rest ranging in color from blond, to dark brown, to cinnamon. There are even white (Kermodes bear) and blue (Glacier bear) color variations found in Canada.

Adult black bears average 5 to 6 feet in length, with males weighing 170 to 480 pounds and females ranging from 130 to 305 pounds.

Black bears can be black, brown, cinnamon, blonde, blue, or white.

### Grizzly Bears

*Ursus arctos* goes by several different common names, including brown bear, grizzly, silver tip, Kodiak bear, and Alaskan brown bear. The term "grizzly" refers to the way in which silver-tipped guard hairs make some brown bears appear "grizzled."

Every brown bear in North America belongs to one of two subspecies: *Ursus arctos horribilis*, or *Ursus arctos middendorffi*. "*Horribilis*" is by far the most common, found nearly throughout the brown bear's entire existing range, from Wyoming to Alaska. *Ursus arctos middendorffi* is an isolated population that exists only on Kodiak, Afognak, and Shuyak islands off the Alaskan coast. Both subspecies are of the basic "circumpolar" brown bear stock found in Europe, Asia, and North America. (Species that range across Europe, Asia, and North America are said to have a "circumpolar" distribution.)

We often think of the grizzly bear as a mountain wilderness animal. However, considering the grizzly's size, power, and wide range of food habits, some biologists argue that grizzlies evolved in open forests and plains. For example, the lack of trees on the prairie for cover or escape could explain the bear's aggressive behavior. With no place to climb or hide, it had to be aggressive defending itself, its young, and its food sources. Contrast such an evolutionary strategy with black bears that spend more of their time in densely forested areas. It is interesting to note that some brown bear populations in other, forested parts of the world have physical and behavioral characteristics more similar to the American black bear than the grizzly.

### Grizzly or Black?

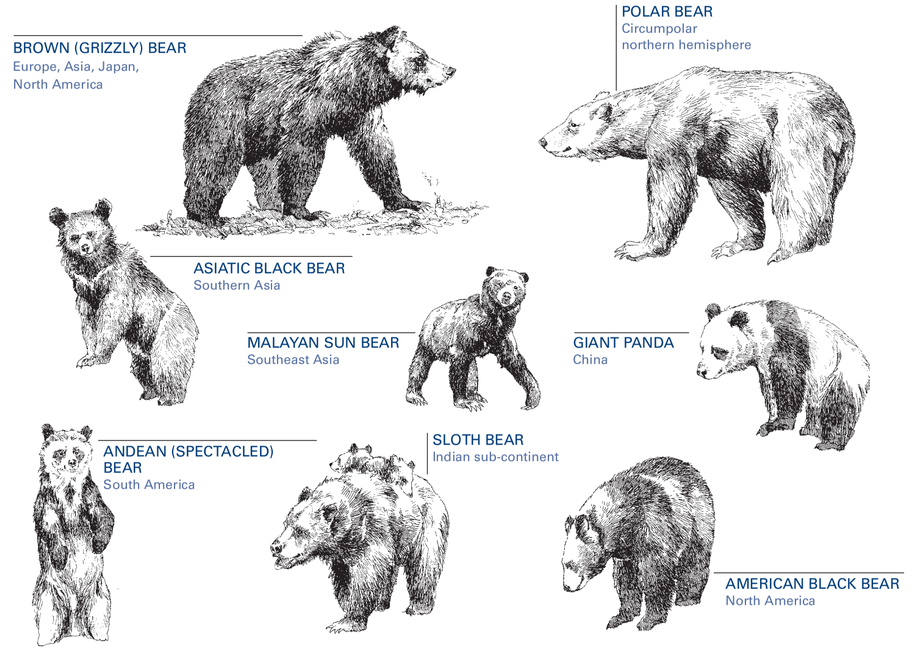
There are four main physical differences between black and grizzly bears: body shape, face, claws, and tooth length. The first three characteristics can be observed from a distance. The fourth requires looking at the skull of a bear.

- Adult grizzlies generally have a hump between their front shoulders. Black bears do not. When walking on all fours, the highest point of a black bear's body is its rump; on a grizzly, the highest point is between the front shoulders.
- Adult grizzlies have a dished face profile. Adult black bears have a straight face profile, sometimes called a Roman nose.
- The heads of the two vary. Black bear skull is broad, narrow muzzle; large jaw hinge; female head may be more slender and pointed; tall pointed ears. Grizzly bear skull is massive; heavily constructed; large in proportion to body; high forehead (steeply rising); concave (dish face); domed head; long muzzle; flat nose tip; eyes tiny; short round ears.
- The last major difference between the two bear species can be found with the skull. The upper molar on a black bear skull is less than 1 1/8 inches long, whereas the same tooth in a grizzly's mouth is longer than 1 1/8 inches.

For Bear Identification Test: www.fwp.state.mt.us

## BEARS OF THE WORLD

There are eight species of bears in the world today. Three live in North America, all in the family *Ursidae*: the black bear (*Ursus americanus*), grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos*), and polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*). Black bears and grizzlies are both found in the Rockies throughout North America.




Andean (spectacled) bear ..... South America
American black bear..... North America
Asiatic black bear ..... Southern Asia
Brown (grizzly) bear ..... Europe, Asia, Japan, North America
Giant Panda..... China
Malayan sun bear ..... Southeast Asia
Polar bear ..... Circumpolar northern hemisphere
Sloth bear..... Indian subcontinent

For more information on each of the eight species, contact www.bearbiology.com.

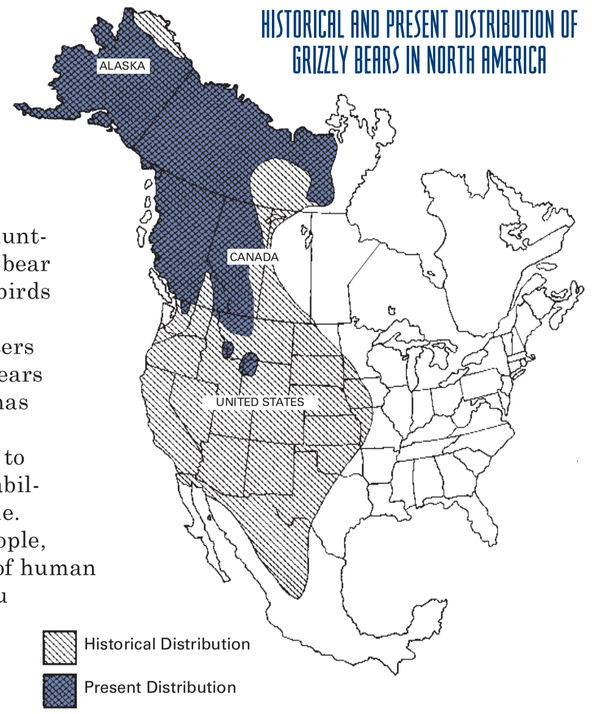
## HOW TO HUNT SAFELY IN GRIZZLY COUNTRY

### "Think grizzly and be prepared":

Grizzlies can be found throughout the Northwestern region of the United States and Western Canada (see map). In recent years grizzly bear populations have expanded and bears are recolonizing historic ranges.

Be aware that the act of hunting puts you at risk of encountering grizzlies and that elk bugling, game calls and cover scents may attract bears.

If you hunt alone in grizzly country let someone know your detailed plans and have a way to periodically check in. Hunting partners should share details of their hunt plans and have a check in or communication system. If you feel uneasy hunting alone in grizzly country, hunt with a partner.




While hunting in grizzly country pay attention to fresh bear sign. Look for bear tracks, scat and concentrations of natural foods. Use caution when hunting in areas that have evidence of bear activity or areas with scavenging birds such as magpies, ravens or crows.

Communicate with other hunters and let them know when grizzly bears have been seen and/or fresh sign has been observed.

Some bears may have learned to associate gunshots with the availability of a big game carcass or gut pile.

When in close proximity to people, most grizzly bears become aware of human presence and leave the area. If you encounter a bear, assess the situation, stay calm and do not run. Decide if the bear is aware of you and threatening or if it is fleeing and unaware. Keep the bear in sight and back away and leave the area. Occasionally bears will quarter toward you when leaving, so continue to be cautious.

When hunting in grizzly country, it is recommended that every hunter carry bear pepper spray. Keep the bear pepper spray within reach and be familiar with the firing mechanism. In sudden grizzly encounters pepper spray has proven to be a valuable deterrent tool. Grizzly bears sprayed in the face at very close range often stop attacking and are less likely to inflict serious injury.

Most grizzly attacks are prompted by inadvertently running into a female with young, surprising a bear at close range or being surprised by a bear that is fleeing another hunter. It is recommended that hunters mentally rehearse a worst-case scenario with grizzly bears. "If the mind has never been there before, the body does not know how to respond."

Use a weapon only if bear pepper spray is unavailable. Be aware that bears wounded with an arrow, knife or firearm may intensify the level of attack. If you have to kill a grizzly in self-defense, take careful aim and attempt to knock it down by hitting major bones in the front shoulders. Other shots to the vital area will kill the bear. Leave the scene immediately and report the incident.

As a last resort, if physically attacked, play dead. Lie face down, covering your neck and head with your hands and arms. If you have a backpack leave it on to protect your back. Stay face down, never look at the bear and remain still until the bear is gone. Many people have survived bear attacks using this method.

Bears are opportunists and change their behavior in order to take advantage of new food sources. So, if you are hunting or living in grizzly country, always assume that grizzlies are in the area and make sure your camps, cabins and homes are bear proof, and that bear attractants are unavailable or contained.

If you have questions pertaining to hunting or living in grizzly bear country, please call your state or provincial wildlife management agency.

- Boone and Crockett Club — www.boone-crockett.org
- Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks — www.fwp.state.mt.us.
- Idaho Fish and Game Department — www2.state.id.us/fishgame
- Wyoming Game and Fish Department — gf.state.wy.us/
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service — www.r6.fws.gov/endspp/grizzly/
- Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee — www.fs.fed.us/r1/wildlife/igbc/
- Bear Trust International — www.beartrust.org.

Poster Design by Julie T. Houk ▪ Boone and Crockett Club ■ Illustrations by Robert Spannring © 2001
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