

Panthertown-Bonas Defeat Bear Sanctuary Key Points
[15A NCAC 10D .0106 BEAR SANCTUARIES]

Provided by Friends of Panthertown
www.panthertown.org

March 2022

Information About Bear Hunting in Panthertown

- Panthertown is located in North Carolina and is part of the Nantahala National Forest. Friends of Panthertown works in partnership with the **U.S. Forest Service** to conserve **Panthertown** as a backcountry natural resource and to enable sustainable recreation.
- Hunting and fishing in Panthertown (as within most of the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests) are activities regulated by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.
- Since its earliest days of public access, the **Panthertown-Bonas Defeat Bear Sanctuary** has been designated by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission as a safe haven for American black bears (*Ursus americanus*). Bear hunting has been prohibited anywhere in Panthertown for more than three decades. The public has long associated Panthertown as a bear sanctuary where the bears are safe and protected from being hunted and “harvested”.
- At their February 2022 business meeting the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission voted unanimously to allow bear hunting by permit in the Panthertown-Bonas Defeat, Pisgah, and Standing Indian Bear Sanctuaries. The Commission also voted to amend the name of these areas from Designated Bear Sanctuaries to Designated Bear Management Areas.
- **Friends of Panthertown does not support bear hunting in Panthertown** and strongly objects to the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission decision to allow bear hunting in Panthertown by permit. Friends of Panthertown does not believe allowing bear hunts in Panthertown will solve human-bear interaction concerns, or is an **appropriate solution**.
- The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission reported they “received significant public comment” about the proposed rule change. In addition to the submission of a public petition with over 7,000 signatures, **2,744 people sent comments to NCWRC. 86% were opposed.**
- Letters requesting a delayed effective date and legislative review of [15A NCAC 10D .0106] Bear Sanctuaries have been submitted to the North Carolina Office of Administrative Hearings Rules Review Committee. Rules are subject to legislative review and a delayed effective date after receiving 10 or more letters of objection pursuant to G.S. 150B-21.3, pending the Rules Review Committee approval. Letters are still currently being accepted.
- Concerned citizens may also wish to contact your legislative representatives for review.

Background Information

- In March 2018 the U.S. Forest Service issued a public notice recommending overnight campers carry bear spray and use bear-resistant containers for storing all food and scented items. USFS also proposed a requirement for bear-resistant food containers to be used by all campers in Panthertown and on the A.T.. No decision was issued, no action was taken.
- To help avoid potential human-bear encounters, Friends of Panthertown is in support of the USFS proposal to require bear-resistant containers when overnight camping in Panthertown.
- In August 2018 former Nantahala District Ranger Mike Wilkins sent a letter “requesting the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission begin the process to allow bear hunting in the sanctuary by permit”. Ranger Wilkins felt “this is needed to protect the public from aggressive, human-acclimated bears that have been conditioned by nearby neighborhoods.” He added, “Most of the encounters involve bears pulling down hanging food sacks and backpacks at dispersed campsites in the Panthertown Valley area as well as some tent damage.” No direct contact with humans or injuries were reported by USFS or NCWRC.

Solutions: Food Storage Vaults and Public Education

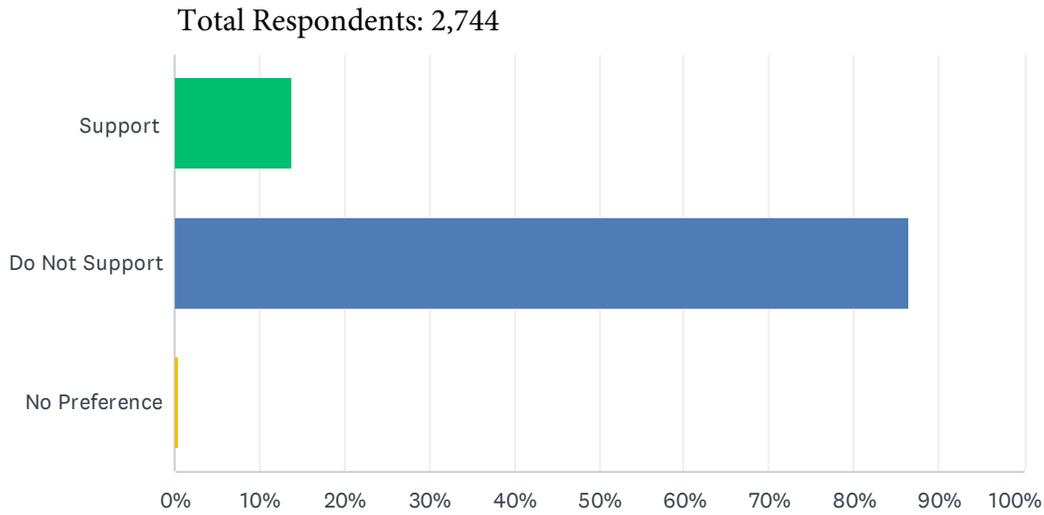
- In the summer of 2020 Friends of Panthertown directly addressed human-bear concerns by working in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and a local Boy Scout troop to install two bear-proof food storage vaults close to popular dispersed campsites in Panthertown.
- Friends of Panthertown has received **no reports of bear-human interactions** since installing the bear vaults in Panthertown. **There have been ZERO reported incidents of human-bear conflicts in Panthertown** since the installation of the two bear-proof food storage vaults in 2020.
- During the summer of 2021 Friends of Panthertown hosted a week long series of Leave No Trace Hot Spot workshops and trainings held throughout our community to address long-term concerns for Panthertown, including reduction of potential for human-bear concerns. 18 partner organizations participated in the planning process, including USFS and NCWRC.
- Continuing through 2022, Friends of Panthertown and their partners have significantly increased public education efforts in Panthertown, and in the surrounding community, by sharing USFS safety information for hiking and camping in bear country, including well-established Leave No Trace, Bear Wise, and Bear Aware best practices.
- **USFS has approved the installation of 3 additional vaults in Panthertown this year.**
- Concerned citizens may also wish to contact your legislative representatives for review.

More information:
www.panthertown.org

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Summary of Public Comments on Proposed Changes
to Land and Water Access for 2022-2023

G13 -Allow permit hunt opportunities on Panthertown – Bonas Defeat, Pisgah, and Standing Indian Bear Sanctuaries in the Mountain Bear Management Unit.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Support	13.48% 370
Do Not Support	86.18% 2,365
No Preference	0.30% 9
TOTAL	2,744

District	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	NC Not Specified	Out of State	Not Disclosed
Support	4		18	5	9	5	10	28	163	129		
Do Not Support	9	2	38	8	67	65	25	40	737	265	714	394
No Preference								1	3	2	3	
TOTAL: 2,744	13	2	56	13	76	70	35	69	903	396	717	394

2018 Public Notice

Attention Panthertown Visitors



Photo By: www.BillLea.com



Due to an increase in close and serious bear encounters in Panthertown, where campers have had to leave campsites and hikers have retreated from a local trail, the U. S. Forest Service is strongly recommending that back country campers use bear resistant containers for all food and scented items.

“Bears quickly learn that a good food source is available at campsites where people have not properly stored their food and trash. We recommend no overnight camping without bear proof containers and some form of personal protection in the back country”, said District Ranger Mike Wilkins. “This will help reduce bear encounters until berries and other natural foods become available. Also, it is advisable to avoid abandoning food containers, backpacks, and other items to a bear one may encounter to avoid teaching the bear to associate people with food.”

**Use bear resistant canisters for back country camping.
Carry a readily available can of bear pepper spray
(rated as bear spray by the U.S. EPA) and follow
manufacturer recommendations.**



Know Before You Go

Preparing to Visit a National Forest

Black Bears

Despite the name, the coat of a black bear isn't always black. There are brown black bears, white black bears and even a blue glacier bear. Experts estimate the average weight of a black bear is 300 pounds. Despite their size, black bears are very agile tree climbers. During times of danger or threat, bear cubs will take shelter in trees.



Bears by nature are opportunists. In the wild, they will feed on whatever is readily available. Food odors and improperly stored garbage will attract bears to campgrounds and picnic sites. Bears become habituated to human food if they find it readily available. Although they are naturally afraid of humans, the animals lose this fear as they begin to associate human scents with the reward of food. Black bears can become a threat to humans, property and themselves—a pattern that normally ends with death. Protect yourself and protect the black bears by storing trash and food in safe locations when you visit a national forest.

Safety Checklist

- Avoid camping and hiking alone in the backcountry.
- Make noise to avoid surprising a bear.
- Never approach a bear or other wild animal.
- Do not hike in the dark.
- Carry EPA registered bear pepper spray.
- Keep a clean camp site by properly disposing of food scraps and garbage.
- Do not leave food or garbage inside fire rings, grills or around your site.
- Never leave food or coolers unattended, even in developed picnic areas.
- If bear-proof containers are not available, store food and garbage inside a hard-top vehicle or trailer. Never store food inside of a tent.
- Wipe tabletops clean before vacating a camp or picnic site.
- If a bear is observed nearby, pack up your food and trash immediately and vacate the area ASAP.
- If necessary, attempt to scare the animal away with loud shouts, by banging pans together, or throwing rocks and sticks at it.
- If a bear approaches, move away slowly; do not run. Get into a vehicle or a secure building.
- Never run away from a bear—back away slowly and make lots of noise.
- If you are attacked by a black bear, try to fight back using any object available. Act aggressively and intimidate the bear by yelling and waving your arms. Playing dead is not appropriate.

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