

# Ask an Expert – Ten Tips for Safe Recreation in Utah's Wildlife Country

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Black Bear

Outdoor recreation in Utah contributes more than \$13 billion to the economy, generates over \$800 million in tax revenues and provides jobs for more than 100,000 people, according to data from the Outdoor Industry Association.

Major outdoor recreation activities include camping, hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing and biking. These activities are considered quiet recreation because they do not involve motorized vehicles. Quiet recreation complies with Governor Herbert's guidance to maintain social distancing to mitigate the community spread of COVID-19.

As more people recreate outdoors, the chance of encountering wildlife also increases. The nature of these encounters will depend on people's knowledge about Utah's wildlife habitats. Irresponsible recreation, particularly when camping, can endanger you and your family as well as other campers. If a wild animal receives a food reward, it will likely seek out other areas frequented by humans for food. This behavior can result in human injury as well as the removal or death of wildlife.

Consider these tips to help you enjoy Utah's great outdoors safely.

\* When camping, keep food properly stored and out of sight. If an animal can see or smell food inside your tent, camp trailer or vehicle, it may try to break in. To prevent this:

- Secure food and trash in odor-free, bear-proof containers.
- Keep food and strong-smelling toiletries 100 yards away from your sleeping area.
- Hang trash or food 10 feet above the ground and 10 feet from the trunk of trees.
- Do not leave pet food or dishes outside.
- Do not put trash in the fire pit and burn it.

\* Stay alert when hiking or biking, and stay on designated trails. Wildlife are most active at dawn and dusk.

\* Always hike, jog or bike with a companion, and make noise to alert animals of your presence.

\* Keep children safe when hiking. Keep them within the group or in sight just ahead of your group.

\* Make noise to alert wildlife of your presence, and void wearing ear buds or headphones that prevent you from hearing approaching wildlife. Being "plugged in" also prevents you from enjoying the sounds of nature.

\* Stay away from animal carcasses, as there could be an unseen predator guarding its meal.

\* Do not toss food or trash along trails.

\* When hiking with pets, keep them supervised and under control. Dogs off leash can chase, injure or kill wildlife, and it is against the law for dogs to harass wildlife. In addition, your pet can be seriously injured if attacked by a wild animal.

\* Observe from a distance. Viewing animals in the wild can be exciting, but keep your distance. If you encounter wildlife on a trail, stay at least 50 feet, or three car lengths, away from the animal. Always give the animal a clear escape route. Crowding it can cause it to attack.

\* Be aware that Utah is home to several species of venomous rattlesnakes. Snakes can hide on open trails and dense grasses. Look carefully before you set your hands or feet down or sit. Always stay on paths and cleared areas, and wear closed-toed shoes while hiking.

For more information, visit [WildAwareUtah.org](http://WildAwareUtah.org).

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