

Commentary

Curbing the nuisance bear's garbage appetite

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SINCE THE EARLY 1900S, the human population in the United States has more than tripled. Likewise, human interactions with wildlife have also increased exponentially (Conover 1995). Within the range of the American black bear (*Ursus americanus*), wildlife officials and land managers are often called upon to deal with nuisance bears. The Fall 2008 issue of *Human–Wildlife Conflicts* (now *Human–Wildlife Interactions*, <<http://berrymaninstitute.org/html/human-wildlife-interactions/fall-2008>>) contained several insightful manuscripts regarding the management of nuisance bears.

I contend that more often than not, the nuisance bears are simply reacting to rewards that humans fail to recognize as attractants. Bird feeders, barbecues, domestic livestock feed, chickens, beehives, fruit trees, and garbage all provide an easy meal for a bear. Bears have a good memory and remember where they found food in their last travels. Thus, most will likely return sometime in the future.

There are numerous methods published regarding the best management practices (BMPs) to keep bears away from attractants provided by humans (Get Bear Smart Society 2017). There are guidelines for keeping bird feeders inaccessible to bears to include moving bird feeders inside at night, when bears are more active. Other nuisance bear BMPs include: 1) storing barbecues and domestic livestock feed in bear-proof enclosures; 2) using electric fences and/or electrified mats as deterrents to protect chickens, beehives, and fruit trees; and 3) keeping bears away from

human garbage. The last BMP has proved somewhat challenging for me.

There are many recommendations to keep bears away from garbage containers. Storing your garbage container inside a bear-proof building and not removing the container until the morning of pickup is one solution. Constructing a bear-resistant enclosure on a concrete pad to store your garbage is another option. Bear-resistant garbage containers are another solution.

A word of caution is in order here: not all bear-resistant containers are created equal. Before purchasing a bear resistant garbage container, make sure it has been tested and certified by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC 2017).

In Western Montana, I have been dealing with bears for decades, always looking for a better solution to the garbage–bear problem. We have both black bears and grizzly bears (*U. arctos*). Five years ago, I tried a new product on the market: the Kodiak Container (Kodiak Products, Prescott, Arizona, USA). I purchased several hundred of these containers, and they worked. This is the fifth season of using the containers, without a single entry into the Kodiaks by either species of bear. The refuse collection company likes them so well, they have purchased several hundred to augment the initial purchase.

The Kodiak containers are primarily being used locally in areas frequented by grizzly bears. Although we have reduced the bear–garbage problem, it is not totally solved. With >5,000 local customers with the refuse



Figure 1. Driver picking up the automated Kodiak container (*Photo courtesy of G. Barce*).

collection company, there are many other areas in need of assistance. During my initial testing of the Kodiak, homeowners reported that the Kodiak would be knocked over for the first few days, then ignored after the bear could not gain entry. After a few weeks, even bear sightings at homes with a Kodiak were reduced considerably.

The Kodiak is a fully automated garbage container. By being fully automated, the refuse collection driver does not have to get out of his truck to unlatch the container before dumping, and the container automatically re-latches when the can is set back down (Figure 1). The container is user-friendly (except for bears) and comes with warranty. I have had a few problems with latches, and the company has promptly sent replacement latches. Overall, the Kodiak has proven to be a good solution to my bear–garbage challenge. The refuse collection company I work with has reported to me that the frequency of entry into garbage containers has been reduced by >80% since they started using the Kodiak.

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