

Wildlife in British Columbia

ACTSAFE SAFETY BULLETIN #47

This bulletin provides guidelines for working safely on locations in British Columbia where there may be wildlife, including remote, rural, and urban areas. Wildlife may vary from region to region, but basic safeguards should always be taken to prevent incidents that can result in serious injuries or illness for performers and crew and to mitigate the impact on wildlife.

This bulletin doesn't include information on pests such as stinging and biting insects, snakes, spiders, rodents, racoons, bats, and birds. For information on those insects and animals, see bulletin #31 – Pests in British Columbia.

HAZARDS

Face-to-face encounters with wildlife that could cause serious injury or transmit disease are one hazard. Motor vehicle incidents involving wildlife are another. There are more than 11,000 wildlife collisions every year in B.C. — that's one every hour, every day. Almost 80% of these collisions involve deer. The risk increases during the hours at dawn and dusk.

Bears

Black bears and grizzly bears are powerful animals that can run as fast as 50 km/h and climb trees. Bears and other wild animals can be more dangerous when they are defending food sources, habituated to human food, or defending their young. When trying to distinguish between a grizzly bear and a black bear, don't just focus on colour or size, which can vary with age or gender. Black bears aren't always black and grizzlies aren't always brown

Cougars, wolves, and coyotes

Cougars are more active at dawn, dusk, and night. They normally avoid confrontation but can be unpredictable. They can be dangerous when feeding on a kill.

Wolves tend to avoid people and are uncommon in most parts of B.C., except for Vancouver Island and other coastal areas.

Coyotes in the wild also tend to avoid people but may pose a risk if they have become habituated to humans. They are more active at dawn, dusk, and night. In urban areas, it's common to see them during the day.

Deer and moose

Deer and moose generally keep to themselves, but females can be protective of their young and males can be aggressive during rutting season. Motor vehicle accidents involving deer and moose on roads and highways can be serious.

CONTROL MEASURES

Employers should assess what animals may be in the area and prepare safe work practices. The production's health and safety program should include information on local wildlife.

All workers who may encounter wildlife must receive education and training, including how to:

- Identify wildlife and their signs
- Avoid or control them
- Prevent and survive attacks or other incidents involving wildlife

General safety tips

- Never approach or feed wildlife.
- If you are in a known animal habitat or see signs of wildlife, make plenty of noise to avoid surprise encounters.



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- Store food securely. Don't leave aromatic food waste, such as grease or spoiled foods, out in the open. Use bear-proof containers, when possible.
- Dispose of garbage safely, and keep the location or set clean. Assign a crew member to do a litter check every hour. Clean garbage containers regularly.
- If you encounter dangerous wildlife, stay calm and never run away. Communicate the encounter (e.g., call it in on a walkie-talkie or sound an air horn). Productions should have check-in protocols for working alone, including ways to communicate in remote locations.
- If an animal is displaying habituated behaviour, report the sighting to a supervisor so the production can report it to a wildlife conservation officer.
- If you have a close encounter with a wild animal, use bear spray as a deterrent, if you have it.

Driving

If workers will be driving through areas where there is wildlife, including to and from locations in some cases, the production should provide them with information and training on road safety and preventing collisions with wildlife. For example:

- Slow down in wildlife areas, especially during dusk, dawn, and night hours.
- Pay attention to "animal crossing" signs.
- Avoid the shoulder and use the centre lane, if there is one.
- Keep an eye on the road ahead, and watch for eyes shining in your headlights or oncoming motorists flashing their lights.
- To avoid deer and smaller animals, consider using your brakes rather than swerving.
- To avoid moose, consider swerving, as the impacts from larger animals can cause significant injury and death.

Bears

Carry bear spray, and know how to use it. Bear spray is only legal to carry and use in the wild. If bear spray is necessary at a location, the production should supply it and provide training on how to use it.

If you see a bear, move away slowly without getting the bear's attention. If at close range, keep the bear in view while avoiding direct eye contact and move away. If the bear is aware of you, identify yourself as human by talking calmly and waving your arms. Keep the bear in view and move away. If the bear starts moving toward you, it will take either a defensive or predatory approach.

Defensive approach

The bear snaps its jaws, lowers its head, flattens its ears, growls, or makes "woofing" sounds. Stand your ground, and talk in a calm voice. If the bear stops advancing, move away slowly. If it comes up to you, use your bear spray or air horn. If you get knocked down, then lie still on your stomach, spread your feet to prevent being rolled over, protect the back of your head, and play dead. Don't move until you are sure the bear has left the area.

Predatory approach

The bear makes eye contact, approaches you directly, and moves quietly and deliberately. Stand your ground. Talk in a firm voice and act aggressively (e.g., make yourself appear as large as possible and make sudden, loud noises). Use your deterrent, but if the bear attacks, fight back with everything at hand, focusing on the bear's face, eyes and nose.

Cougars

Stay in groups of two or more. Watch for cougar tracks and signs. Cougars cover unconsumed portions of their kills with soil and leaf litter. Avoid these food caches.

If you see a cougar

- Stay calm, and talk to the cougar confidently.
- Pick up children immediately. Children frighten easily and their rapid movements may provoke an attack.
- Don't turn your back on the cougar. Face it, remain upright, and back away slowly, leaving a clear exit for the cougar.
- Act aggressively. Make yourself appear as large as possible. Pick up sticks or branches and wave them about.



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If a cougar is aggressive or follows you:

- Respond aggressively. Maintain eye contact, yell and make loud noises.
- Pick up sticks, rocks, or whatever you have at hand to use as a weapon if necessary.
- If the cougar attacks, fight back. Focus on its face and eyes.
- Convince the cougar that you are a threat, not prey. Never play dead.

Wolves and coyotes

If you see a coyote or wolf acting unafraid or aggressive, do the following as soon as you notice the animal, even if it's a long way away:

- Act aggressively. Make loud noises and maintain eye contact. Wave your arms in the air to make yourself appear larger.
- Pick up small pets and children.
- When in a group, act in unison to send a clear warning to the animals.

- Back away slowly. Don't turn your back or run as you increase your distance.
- If it's a wolf, maintain a minimum distance of 100 m (330 ft.). Throw objects such as sticks and rocks for intimidation.
- If a coyote attacks, use your feet or a large stick to attack its ribs and stomach.

Deer and moose

- Give deer and moose a wide berth and make sure they have an escape route.
- If threatened, deer and moose will flatten their ears and lower their head before charging.
- Avoid eye contact, back away slowly and speak softly.
- Find an escape route and position large objects between you and the animal.
- Bear spray will work on deer, but may not work on moose.

RELATED RESOURCES

- [Bear Spray: Safe Use and Deployment](#) (WildSafeBC)
- [Contact Conservation Officer Services](#) (Government of British Columbia)
- [Plan for and Prevent Encounters with Bears and other Hazardous Wildlife](#) (WorkSafeBC)
- [Preventing Collisions with Wildlife](#) (Road Safety at Work)
- [Wildlife Health](#) (Government of British Columbia)
- [Wildlife Safety](#) (BC Parks)

Actsife Safety Association

Actsife (www.actsafe.ca) is a not-for-profit health and safety association supporting British Columbia's arts and entertainment industries. Actsife provides resources and training to employers, workers, and supervisors. We are always here to provide information relevant to best practices around health and safety in the arts and entertainment industries in B.C.

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