

FISHING IN BEAR COUNTRY

By John & Heidi Rao

Individuals engaged in fishing while in bear country have a serious issue to contend with – game. Bear literally fish for a living. Thus bears know the smell and associate this smell with food. In essence, when an angler lands his or her catch, they are enticing a large predator to come and eat! It is no different than a trapper baiting a trap for any animal, and using its preferred food as the lure.

Anglers must handle their catch with extreme care. Landed fish need to be bled immediately in the water. This can be done by removing the gills and gutting the fish. All entrails, or left over fish parts, after being filleted need to be cut up into small pieces and thrown into the fast current of the river or stream. This will carry the leftovers away from you and prevent fish smells from lingering in the area. The idea is to not engage in the practice of baiting bears.

After the fish is bled, it needs to be placed in a bear proof container or on a stringer and kept near you. This prevents bears from associating fishermen with an easy food source. If the stringer is with you, the fish can be tossed into deeper water if a bear approaches. Likewise, placing the fish in a bear-proof container will prevent the animal from getting a free meal.

If bears arrive at your fishing spot, let them have it. In the wild it is not first come, first served. Bears have the right-of-way at a fishing hole. If you have a fish on the line when a bear approaches, stop fishing to avoid causing the fish to splash and entice the bear into continuing its advance. If the fish continues to thrash, free spool the line or cut it. The idea is not to lure in the bear by providing it an opportunity for an easy meal!

If you encounter a bear, give it the right-of-way and offer it a way to retreat. Never make a bear feel as if it is cornered. This will only trigger an attack. If the bear does not immediately run away, make yourself look larger by waving your arms, a stick, backpack, and if with others, stand side by side. At the same time start yelling and backing away slowly. If possible bang pots and pans together, blow a whistle, and throw rocks at the animal. While in the process of trying to scare the bear off, the individual faced with this threat needs to start looking for an escape route.

Most of the states in bear country allow people engaged in hunting and fishing to use deadly means to protect themselves or their property against bears. The one exception is the protection of game and fish. In other words, do all you can to prevent a bear from taking your legally taken game. Ultimately though, if a bear wants your game and you cannot prevent it without deadly force, it belongs too the bear!!