

# Maximizing the health of Colorado's black bears

**B**lack bears are hard-wired to minimize calorie loss while maximizing calorie gain. They thrive when they have sufficient food, water and minimal human pressure in their critical habitat, the wild places they call home.

After emerging from dens in the spring, these omnivorous creatures travel to lower elevations to feed upon highly digestible, green vegetation. They are consuming 2,000-2,500 calories a day.

The vast majority of black bears will migrate to oak brush habitats, where available, in the middle of August in search of berries and acorns, often migrating 20-30 miles from their summer range to traditional fall ranges. During this fall hyperphagia (feeding frenzy) phase, if the food supply is there, bears will feed up to 20 hours a day, consume 15,000-20,000 calories per day and add



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2-4 pounds of fat each day to build up enough fat reserves to get through hibernation.

Successful wildlife conservation for black bears requires focusing on the needs of bears and people simultaneously. Colorado Parks and Wildlife has two black bear management goals:

- Reduce human-bear conflicts (public safety)
- Maximize hunter satisfaction

Gov. Jared Polis and House Bill 21-1326 set aside \$1 million for work to reduce human-bear conflicts. Brenda Lee, founder and president of the Colorado Bear Coalition is leading this statewide effort in partnership with Colorado

“Reducing human-bear conflict is just one piece of the wildlife conservation puzzle.”

Parks and Wildlife staff.

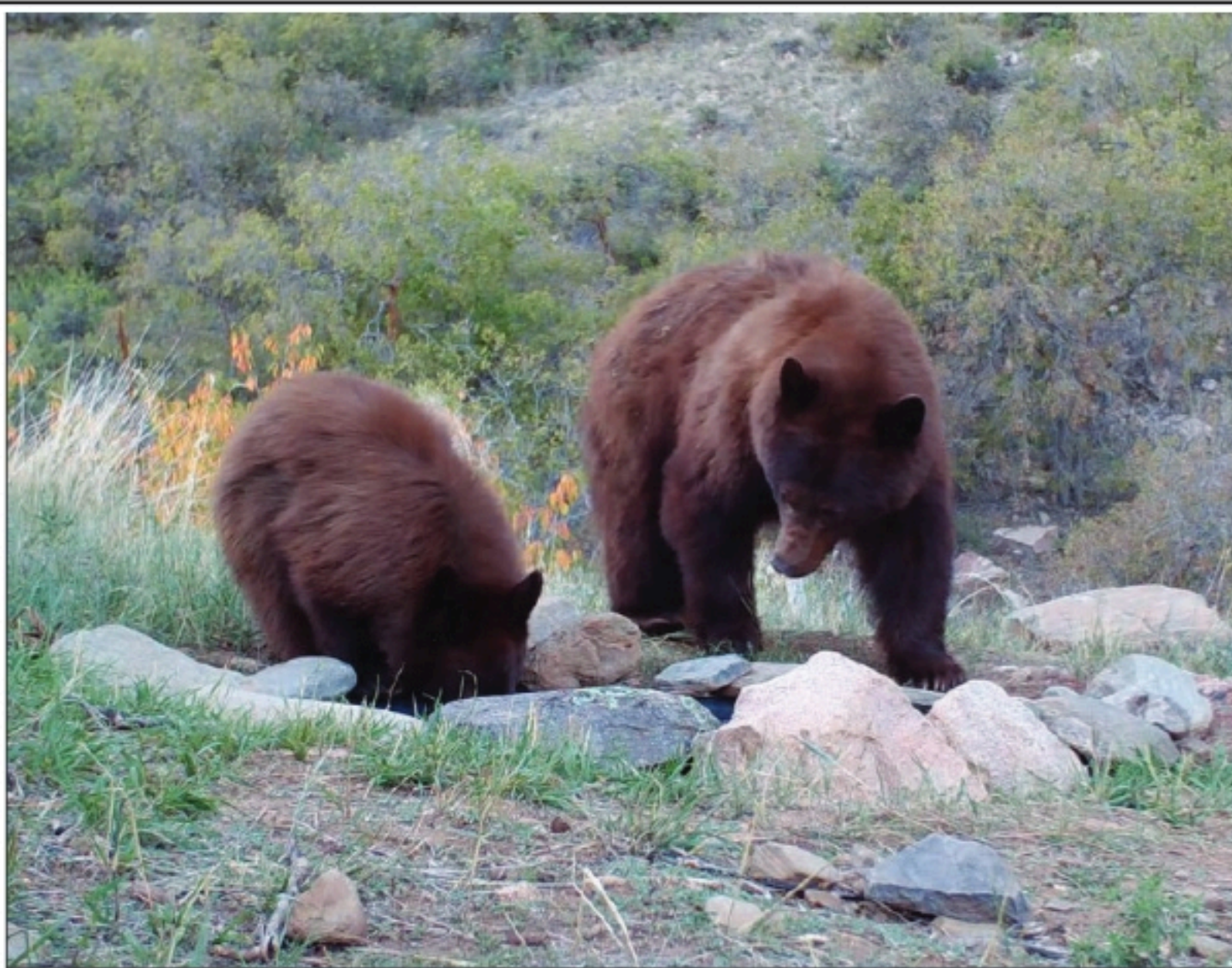
Lee writes, “Bear-protection groups across the state have formed over the last decade to take a proactive approach, rather than relying on reactive management. These community groups have served a vital role, by identifying bear attractants and working with city/county officials to enact laws and ensure that bear-saving laws are enforced.”

Reducing human-bear conflict is just one piece of the wildlife conservation puzzle. The second is making sure bears have what they need in the wild places they inhabit, beginning with sufficient forage and water, places to den and minimal human pressure.

Ensuring black bears have sufficient water where they forage is critical to

keeping them wild. During the hyperphagia period, the water consumed by bears increases dramatically as they work to digest all that food. The wildlife guzzler in the photo of this article was installed by students from Preston Middle School in Fort Collins to provide water for black bears where they were foraging. The goal was to keep bears from traveling down to the river where they would come in contact with humans. The bears would get a drink and head back into their habitat to forage.

Other efforts include planting native chokecherries, wild plums, currants and other plants, which improve bear habitat. The demand from the public to



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Beyond limiting human-bear interactions, we need to ensure bears have what they need in the wild places they inhabit. This includes water sources like this water guzzler installed by students from Preston Middle School in Fort Collins.

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help with these efforts is always strong and something that can be tapped into by numerous conservation organizations.

Supporting and respecting black bears is something all of us can do. Let's eliminate food attractants, beginning with securing our trash, taking down bird

feeders where bears are active, keeping our barbecue grills clean, and avoiding feeding wildlife.

In addition to eliminating attractants, there are wildlife conservation opportunities with a focus on supporting black bears. Supporting organizations like Bear Smart Durango and the Colorado Bear Coalition are simple steps in the right direction that

really make a difference. To stay informed and learn about wildlife conservation opportunities, visit the Wild Nature Media website at [WildNatureMedia.com](http://WildNatureMedia.com). For bear and other wildlife footage, check out [Youtube.com/c/wildnaturemedia](http://Youtube.com/c/wildnaturemedia).

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