

What's happening at Moraine Lake this year?

The Moraine Lake area is used by a high number of people in the summer and fall, and use is increasing every year. High visitation has resulted in two management issues: conflict between bears and people, and increasing traffic congestion and overflow parking.

Traffic congestion

On a prime summer day, 5,000 people visit Moraine Lake. Traffic congestion and overflow parking often occur during peak visitation hours (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.) resulting in a poor sense of arrival for visitors. Overflow parking along the Moraine Lake road creates a "wall of steel" which reduces the ability for bears to move through the area and also creates a dangerous mix of pedestrians and traffic. *Vista: Lake Louise*, a visitor transportation bus service is being piloted and evaluated this year. This bus service is focused primarily on providing Lake Louise campers with transportation to Moraine Lake and upper Lake Louise. Please contact or visit the Lake Louise Visitor Centre or Campground for further details.

Grizzly bears

In 1995, a young grizzly bear established the Moraine Lake area as part of its home range. This area includes Larch/Eiffel, Consolation and Paradise Valleys, and the Valley of the Ten Peaks. As a result of frequent exposure to people, the "Moraine Lake grizzly" has become habituated to people; this means it has lost its natural fear of people. Habituated bears become increasingly bold and may act aggressively. All bears are dangerous and should never be approached or fed.

This bear has been involved in a number of encounters with people, none of which resulted in contact and injury; however, the nature of the encounters was serious enough that Area Closures were put in place in 1996, 1997 and 1998. In 1999, Parks Canada tested "Restricted Access" as a management option that allows continued use, but in a way that maximizes public safety and minimizes further habituation of this bear. Under Restricted Access, hikers are **legally** required to hike in a tight group of six or more. Number of encounters were much reduced last season relative to 1998. Restricted Access will continue to be evaluated as a management option this season. It is not a replacement for a Closure. A Closure can preclude Restricted Access (and a Warning) if warranted.

This year we are asking all backcountry users to voluntarily hike in a tight group of six or more prior to any legal requirement to do so. By preventing further bear encounters, the need for an Area Closure may be reduced. Please read and practice the bear safety protocols outlined "Keep the Wild in Wildlife", available at any park visitor centre or the Banff web site.

It is important that group members stay close together at all times; all members should be able to see and easily speak with each other. A group that spreads out along the trail basically creates a number of small groups that are at a greater risk of a bear encounter. Travelling in a large, tight group makes your presence more obvious to bears; they are more likely to avoid you.

At any time this season, you may find one of the following signs posted for trails in the Moraine Lake area: **Bear Warning**, **Restricted Access**, or **Closure**. A Warning is posted when a bear is frequenting an area, while a Closure is posted when a serious bear-human encounter occurs.

Under Restricted Access, hikers are **legally required to hike in a tight group of six or more** and should practice all the other usual bear safety precautions, e.g. make noise. Climbers and scramblers must also be in a

group of six or more in any areas under Restricted Access. Some approaches and descents for climbs immediately adjacent to the Rockpile and Lakeshore trails are not likely to be affected by Restricted Access, including:

- Access to the Tower of Babel via the Rockpile trail
- Access to the Neil Colgan Hut and surrounding peaks via the Lakeshore trail and connector trail to the Perren or Schiesser routes, and
- Other peaks between Mt. Babel and Wenkchemna Pass that are approached via the Lakeshore trail and the peaks further west via the Wenkchemna Moraine / Glacier.

Please check on the status of trails in the area prior to heading out.

With respect to biking on the Moraine Lake Highline trail, Dr. Steven Herrero has been contracted to evaluate the unique conflicts between bears and bikes on this trail. Based on his recommendations, expected in several weeks, Parks Canada will decide if or how bikes can use the trail under Restricted Access. The Bow Valley Bike Alliance is working with Parks Canada to review biking opportunities. Under Restricted Access, horse users in Paradise Valley must ride in a group of two or more, and backcountry camping in Paradise Valley will not be permitted.

An assessment of public understanding, compliance levels, resources required, and the activities of the bear will be used to evaluate Restricted Access. Warden patrols and trail cameras and counters will be used to monitor group size. Anyone not complying with minimum group size or camping restrictions will be charged and subject to a court appearance and a maximum fine of \$2,000.

Attempts to trap, collar and monitor this bear have not been successful to date, but may be attempted again this season. A short Closure will be required if traps are in place.

The Moraine Lake grizzly is a bear at risk. It is habituated, obtained human food once and may become more aggressive in searching for more food. If this bear is involved in further encounters with people, it may have to be destroyed. The key to keeping bears wild and alive is to prevent or quickly curtail habituation. Please practice bear safety precautions at all times in bear country, and hike in a group of six or more when in the Moraine Lake area (even when you're not legally required to do so). Bears are an important part of the Rocky Mountain ecosystem. Please keep yourself safe and the bears wild.

Your comments are most welcome:

Parks Canada
Box 99
Field, BC V0A 1G0

For further information or a current trail report, please contact:

Lake Louise Visitor Centre: 403.522.3833
Banff national park trail conditions (recording): 403.760.1305
www.parkcanada.pch.gc.ca/banff