

News Release

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For Immediate Release

Contacts: Shannon Therriault, RS, Environmental Health Director, 406-258-4988

James Jonkel, Bear Conflict Specialist, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, 406-542-5500



Missoula Health Officials ask Health Board to Approve New Regulations to Reduce Bears' Access to Garbage

The Missoula City-County Health Board will again take up proposed regulations to reduce bears' access to garbage in Missoula County at their meeting next week. In addition to expanding the bear buffer zone and related trash requirements around the Missoula Valley, health officials are asking the Health Board to approve a bear mitigation zone around the Potomac Valley.

The meeting will start at 12:15 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 17, in Room 210 at the Missoula City-County Health Department, located at 301 W. Alder in Missoula. Those who cannot attend in person can join on Microsoft Teams. Members of the public can visit [Missoula County Voice](#) to find the proposed rules, bear zone maps and other materials and the meeting link to join virtually. The public can also submit comments or questions on Missoula County Voice by Wednesday, Aug. 16.

The board first considered the regulations at their June meeting, and the proposal they will hear this month incorporates public comment received since then, including requests to include the Potomac Valley east of Missoula in the bear buffer zone.

After receiving a comment about the bear issues in Potomac, Environmental Health Director Shannon Therriault confirmed with Jamie Jonkel, FWP Bear Conflict Specialist for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Region 2, that the Potomac Valley is a concern because of the amount of trash left unsecured and the number of bears, including grizzly bears, frequenting the area.

"The Potomac Valley, especially in the Union Creek area, is one of the worst 'bear behavior traps' I have seen in Western Montana," Jonkel said. "Essentially, it has become a training ground for bears to seek food rewards from garbage."

Bears that become accustomed to foraging in garbage cause a number of problems. They scatter trash, damage property in search of food and cause public safety concerns. If the bear is "removed," meaning relocated or killed, another bear is likely to take its place if unsecured trash is still available. Jonkel noted that "the current reactive approach to human-bear conflicts is ineffective, dangerous for people, and a deadly cycle for bears." The proposed rules would also broaden the current Bear Buffer Zone around the city of Missoula. That zone was established in 2010 and is currently limited to properties within the city limits. The expanded zone would encompass the upper

Rattlesnake, Bonner, Pattee Canyon, Miller Creek, Big Flat, O'Keefe Creek, Butler Creek and Grant Creek.

Based on FWP data from 2018 to 2021, 49% of the recorded human-bear conflicts were caused by unsecured garbage. The proposed regulations would reduce bears' access to unsecured garbage by requiring bear-resistant containers or enclosures.

If approved by the Health Board, the Board of County Commissioners and City Council would need to adopt the proposed rules before they go into effect.

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