

## Get Wild: Teach your cubs well

*Gail Marshall*



**A bear cub is pictured in a tree just outside of Breckenridge. The bear pictured here was not involved in the incident mentioned in this column, but as bears emerge from their dens with cubs this time of year its important to be "bear aware" to avoid human-bear conflicts.**

*Lee Metzger/Courtesy photo*

Last week, my neighbor looked out her window to see two black bear cubs nursing. The sow, their mother, was sitting against a tree. In Summit County, late April or early May is the time when sows emerge from the den with cubs in tow who are about 3 months old. The scene was like one from a Disney film. When my neighbor showed me the video, my suspicion of a den nearby was confirmed.

Bears' dens vary and are creative. Bears design their dens to be tight and are naturally insulated for winter warmth. Unlike cartoons, bears do not live in big caves. A den may be under a porch, insulating piles of what Mother Nature provides, a culvert, or the most popular type of den is where the bears have excavated the ground. Bears do move around during winter months and may use previously built dens.

Older boars are the first to emerge from winter lethargy as they were the last to find a spot to hunker down in. Often, bears will begin to wander around in mid-March only to realize there is little food. There was one bear that lived by Keystone who used to take a trash can full of garbage and drag it back to a culvert until mid-April.

---

---

We are taught from an early age that bears hibernate, but scientists now agree that bears do not fully hibernate through the winter. Instead they enter a state of torpor, which is a behavioral adaptation for when food is scarce and bears are relying on their fat reserves to sustain them through the winter. In torpor, metabolism slows down, but they can still get up if necessary. Spring is when the bears look to restore the lost body fat.

Not long ago, a neighbor's house-sitter put the garbage out the night before. The trash cans were not wildlife resistant. A sow and her cubs went to feast. The dog was barking frantically, so the dog was let out. The sow sent the cubs up the utility power pole for safety, and she followed the cubs up the pole. It was during the early morning hours, and the entire neighborhood's power went out. XCEL Energy's truck showed up the next morning. The technician found the sow at the base of the utility pole. She had been electrocuted by the transformer trying to climb the utility pole. The two cubs were safe at the top of the pole.

---

---

Proactive public engagement is crucial in informing local authorities about potential issues, such as problem trash, before it escalates is important. Even if you have a garage or shed, please use wildlife-resistant trash cans year-round. Cooperation and understanding are essential for [reducing conflicts with bears](#) and finding long-term solutions to this complex issue. Teach your children well. Remember bears barge in. The habits the cubs learn now they will have for the next 25 years since bears have long-term memory. Other animals will also get into the trash.

Summit County received a grant from Colorado Parks and Wildlife to upgrade trash bins, commercial dumpsters, or garbage enclosures. Go to Bear Safe Summit to learn more and apply:

[SummitCountyCo.gov/1636/Bear-Safe-Summit](https://SummitCountyCo.gov/1636/Bear-Safe-Summit)

Bears and their cubs are becoming increasingly active.

Be sure to:

- Take down bird feeders (the birds and squirrels will be fine now)
- Secure trash, and pick up other potential food/ attractants
- Put trash out on the morning of trash pick-up
- And please leave bear cubs alone



Gail Marshall

Gail Marshall

**“Get Wild” publishes on Fridays in the Summit Daily News. Gail Marshall has lived in Breckenridge for 30 years and is a friend of Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance, an all-volunteer nonprofit that helps the U.S. Forest Service protect and preserve the wilderness areas in Eagle and Summit counties. For more information, visit [EagleSummitWilderness.org](http://EagleSummitWilderness.org).**