

**If you care, leave that cub there**

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Montana's black and grizzly bears start emerging from their dens in early April in an eons old spring ritual.

As they awaken, the mother bear must begin to gather early grasses and high-protein pine nuts, beetles, rubs and other invertebrates to build their milk supply. The cubs stay behind near the den, or in nearby snow-free areas, and the mother frequently checks on them. The bear knows exactly where her cubs are secured.

"Sadly, this idyllic scene sometimes goes off track if a cub is spotted by well-meaning people who think it is an orphan, or if the mother bear is injured or killed," said Jamie Jonkel, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks bear manager in Missoula.

Because bears, and other wildlife species, stow their newborns so they can forage for food, people will sometimes find the young and mistakenly believe they are abandoned or orphaned. "Grizzly and black bears rarely abandon their cubs," said Jonkel. The mantra of wildlife experts is, "If you care, leave them there."

In cases where a mother bear has been killed, the location of any cubs should be immediately reported to FWP. Jonkel urges people not to disturb the cubs or remove them from the wild. FWP will observe them for several days to assess the situation and determine the best course of action.

On the rare occasion when FWP removes a cub from the wild, it then must be cared for through the summer by trained staff at the wildlife rehabilitation center managed by FWP in Helena. There the bear has the chance to bulk up on road kill and rotted fruit for their future release back into the wild.

While the rehabilitation center may be the best place for a bear cub that is the victim of a truly tragic circumstance, it is not a good place for a young bear mistakenly identified as an orphan. Jonkel said FWP is very careful to ensure no bear cub needlessly lives in a captive situation, missing out on vital training its mother would have provided.

"People can't teach bear cubs how to be wild bears, only a mother bear can do that," he said.

This spring is an opportunity to make good choices for Montana's wild bears. Please keep in mind that April is when bears come out of hibernation. If you live in bear country, it is time to remove or securely store all bear attractants, including bird feeders and pet food. If you are outdoors and see a bear cub, move on as quickly and quietly as possible. It is tempting, but for the bear's sake, don't touch!

It is illegal to harvest female black bears with young. To learn more about living with Montana's bears, go to the FWP website at [fwp.mt.gov](http://fwp.mt.gov) and look under Wild Things for Montana's Field Guide and for Living with Wildlife tips.

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