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**File Code:** 1950  
**Date:** August 14, 2018

Dear Interested Public:

Visitors to the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests have experienced an increasing number of encounters with black bears exhibiting bold behavior over food in the past few years. Most incidents occur in the back country rather than at developed campgrounds that have bear-proof trash cans. Bears have been taking food and backpacks, damaging tents, and staying near inhabited campsites for extended periods.

Bears are very reluctant to give up an easy food source and they have not been discouraged by hikers banging pots, blowing air horns, and yelling. Using bear-resistant food containers is the surest way to deny bears access to human food. The Forest Service has increased public awareness efforts by posting material at trail heads, on websites, and on social media in an effort to educate visitors on the importance of eliminating human behaviors that lead bears to see people as a source of food.

However, because potentially serious encounters with bears have continued to increase, the Forest Service is now seeking input on a proposal to require bear resistant food containers for all overnight campers on the Appalachian Trail located on the National Forests in North Carolina and in Panthertown on the Nantahala Ranger District. The Appalachian Trail passes through the Appalachian, Nantahala, Cheoah, and Tusquitee Ranger Districts.

Comments should be submitted by September 19, 2018. Comments can be emailed to [comments-southern-north-carolina-nantahala-nantahala@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southern-north-carolina-nantahala-nantahala@fs.fed.us) or mailed to Johnny Wills, Wildlife Biologist, Nantahala National Forest, 90 Sloan Road, Franklin, NC 28734.

The Forest Service strongly encourages visitors to be mindful of sanitation and hygiene in the back country. Bears locate food sources by smell as well as sight. You can protect yourself and protect bears by storing trash and food safely. Keep scented items in bear-proof canisters and store the containers well away from your campsite. Never keep scented items in your tent, including toothpaste, deodorant, beverages, or snacks. Pick up all garbage around your site, including inside fire rings, and properly store with food and scented items until you are able to dispose of it in a bear-proof trash receptacle.

Report bear encounters to your local ranger district office. For more information, visit [www.fs.usda.gov/nfsnc](http://www.fs.usda.gov/nfsnc).

Sincerely:

/s/ *Mike Wilkins*

MICHAEL WILKINS  
District Ranger  
Nantahala Ranger District

