

As you know, we had a black bear in the neighborhood for about two weeks. I spoke with Breanne Strepina, a biologist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission this morning for an update on the bear.

**She reported that they removed this particular bear last Friday evening, 7/17.** It was a young male bear, and the biologists felt that it came here from the Chassahowitzka area in northern Hernando. She said a group of about 20 bears live in that area, and that this young bear may have been forced out of the area by the older male bears, since they saw claw marks on its snout. They decided to trap and remove it based on the number of concerned residents, and to see if it would remain in the protected Chassahowitzka area. In case you weren't aware, Florida black bears are a threatened species and protected by Florida law.

With the assistance of one of our residents on Cedar Elm Terrace, they identified where the bear was bedding down and placed the trap. Once it was captured, they tattooed it, took samples for identification and transported it. However, Breanne feels that there may be a good chance that it or another bear will return to our area. She said that we have a good habitat nearby, the Starkey Wilderness Preserve, and that we live on what is a good corridor for animal movement. If it or other bears return, then they likely will decide not to remove it unless it is a threat to humans. She stressed that bears' normal activities are not considered threatening, and that they have many neighborhoods where bears are fairly common sightings.

Breanne was very complimentary of the residents of Suncoast Lakes, saying that everyone she spoke to was very knowledgeable about bears and proper behavior. She asked that I share the attached pamphlets, which I have summarized for you in case you cannot open Adobe Acrobat:

- Secure your trash cans inside, or in a bear-proof storage area.
- Do not put your trash out for pickup until the morning of pickup, not the evening before.
- Do not put out bird feeders, or if you must have them, bring them in at night.
- Do not feed pets outside, or if you must, clean up the area immediately afterwards and bring all food dishes inside.
- DO NOT FEED ANY WILDLIFE, including raccoons and squirrels. It is against Florida law, and it WILL attract other wildlife.
- Clean barbeque grills after each use, and if possible store them inside.

If you come into contact with a bear:

- Back away slowly.
- Speak in a low, calm, assertive voice.
- Do not make direct eye contact.
- Remain standing upright.
- Do not run from the bear.

Bears who do not find an attractive food source will move on and not revisit the area. If we make our neighborhood attractive to a bear, then WE make him into a nuisance bear who will most likely have to be killed. Please share this information with your neighbors, and I will ask that it be posted on our community website.

Sincerely, Jill Sculerati, Chairperson, Neighborhood Watch