

To: 2016 Canadian Orienteering Championships Participants

Re: Bear spray requirement for adult participation in 2016 Canadian Orienteering Championships (Sprint, Middle and Long events)

February 19, 2016

Dear Event Participant,

For many years, the Canmore Nordic Centre Provincial Park (CNCPP) has worked closely with event organizers to promote Wildsmart strategies and best practices aimed at reducing negative human-wildlife interactions during events. One of the most effective strategies for avoiding a negative encounter is carrying bear spray. Although this accepted practice has become common place among recreationalists in the Bow Valley, there has been some reluctance among race participants to carry bear spray while out on course. This is despite the fact that every year, there are multiple encounters with bears and other wildlife in event settings at the CNCPP.

We want all race event participants to be as safe as possible and yet recognize that unless mandated, carrying a can of bear spray can bring with it a slight weight penalty to those voluntarily choosing safety over competitive advantage. Since 2013, the CNCPP has worked closely with organizers of numerous non-winter events that expose participants to a risk of wildlife encounters, requiring participants to carry bear spray while on course. The CNCPP now applies this requirement to all events with a significant risk of wildlife encounters. This will include the 2016 COC Long and Sprint events (both at CNCPP) as well as the 2016 COC Middle event, which is in Bow Valley Provincial Park South.

As an adult participant in 2016 Canadian Orienteering Championships (Sprint, Middle and Long events), you will be required to carry bear spray while out on course. You will be asked to show your can of bear spray to a designated individual at the start line and will not be permitted to start without it. If you are found to be on course without bear spray, or if you arrive at the finish without bear spray, you will be disqualified from the event.

Alternate measures will be taken at these events for participants under the age of 18, to ensure their safety on the course. More details about this will be available once an agreement has been reached with Parks officials.

Implementation of the bear spray requirement for these events is a significant step and not one that has been taken lightly. This requirement will enhance the safety of visitors, protect the wildlife population and ensure the continued viability of the Canmore Nordic Centre as a premier event hosting facility. Thank you for your understanding and your cooperation with this requirement for your personal safety.



Kitty Jones
AOA President



Michael Roycroft, BA, MPA
Area Manager, Specialized Facilities &
Trails | Kananaskis Region, Parks
Division Alberta Environment and Parks



APPENDIX A
Bear Spray Policy Questions and Answers

Re: COC2016 orienteering events

1. Question: Why mandate bear spray when the chance of encountering a bear during a race event is very low?

Answer: In recent years, a number of sightings as well as closer encounters with bears and cougars have occurred in the Bow Valley, both within recreational groups and CNCPP racers. While the vast majority of these do not result in injury, the increased number of events and participants increase the odds of a negative interaction. The use of bear spray has become recognized as the most effective way of safely deterring an approaching grizzly or black bear at close range.

2. Question: Aren't people safe when they travel in groups of four or more? Why mandate this for events when there are hundreds of racers out in the forest?

Answer: There have been no documented cases of bears attacking groups of six or more hikers clustered in close proximity (within talking distance) to each other. This is why some CNCPP events where large groups of participants are traveling in close proximity with each other are exempted from this requirement. However, with the events such as orienteering races, participants become spread out and isolated from others, both on and off trail. Also, with higher speed comes the increased probability of a surprise encounter with a bear.

3. Question: Why not leave it up to individual event organizers or participants to make such decisions?

Answer: The CNCPP has undertaken numerous initiatives to reduce the risk of a negative wildlife encounter and educate event participants on the safety benefits of carrying bear spray while out on course. These have included: placement of warning signage, pre-race announcements by Conservation Officers, trail sweeps and bear hazing by specially trained Karelian Bear Dogs, bear spray demonstrations, participant orientation and engagement with Wildsmart volunteers, information booths, information inserts in race packages, garbage management, the removal of vegetative attractants from along CNCPP trails and bear safety videos on day lodge monitors. While evidence suggests that awareness of safe travel habits has increased, this awareness has not translated into substantial behaviour change among race participants. The potential for a negative encounter has not diminished and only personal preparedness will help in such situations. The CNCPP takes the safety of all visitors very seriously and is mandating this requirement to ensure that more people involved in events are prepared in case of a negative wildlife encounter.

4. Question: Why require this of event staff, volunteers and participants? Why not require this of anyone under age 18 or public recreationalists?

Answer: Alberta Parks recommends all Park visitors carry bear spray with them while on these orienteering maps. However, currently Alberta Parks does not have the authority to mandate this use by the general public, nor by anyone under the age of 18. Participants younger than 18 will not be required to carry bear spray unless they choose to AND if a parent or guardian signs a consent on their behalf. Alternate measures will be taken at the event to ensure the safety of minors, including giving all minors

later start times. More details about this will be available once an agreement has been reached with Alberta Parks.

Studies have shown that those involved in bear attacks escaped injury up to 92% of the time with use of bear spray. The following links provide more information on this research:

- http://bearsafety.com/uploads/Wildsmart_bearspray.pdf
- <http://news.byu.edu/archive08-mar-bearspray.aspx>
- http://bearsafety.com/uploads/Herrero_Higgins_Vol_10.pdf

5. Question: Isn't the risk of a bear spray can accidentally discharging and causing injury greater than the risk of a negative bear encounter?

Answer: While there is a slight chance of accidental discharge through blunt force impact, if the trigger lock is in place and the can is properly secured to your body, pack or bike, it should not discharge except in extreme situations. When piloted during the 24hrs of Adrenalin Mountain Bike Race at CNCPP in 2013, there were no documented cases of accidental discharge despite over 6,000 individual laps by over 1,600 riders carrying bear spray.

6. Question: Why is this being done at all three orienteering championship events in 2016?

Answer: The CNCPP has taken a number of innovative steps (as listed in the response to Question 3) to enhance the safety of its visitors that are not currently being done elsewhere. This is one additional step forward in enhancing the personal safety of event participants. Alberta Parks is piloting the bear spray requirement at the 2016 COC Middle event, in that this is the first competitive event with this requirement outside CNCPP. The Bow Valley corridor, from the Banff Park boundary to the eastern edge of the mountains, is unique in that it is an important wildlife corridor and has a greater concentration of bears and cougars than most other event venues in Alberta. Alberta Parks will assess the outcomes of the three COC events and anticipates influencing a growing culture of widespread practice of carrying bear spray, in the Bow Valley corridor. Finally, Banff National Park has made bear spray a mandatory requirement for hikers during certain times of the year on certain trails <http://www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/mtn/ours-bears/gestion-management/ours-bears/minnewanka.aspx>. It is hoped that with success here, this best practice can be implemented elsewhere.

7. Question: What rationale was used to determine which events are affected and which are not?

Answer: In collaboration with Alberta Parks Park Ecologists, the CNCPP has identified events that are subject to this mandatory requirement based on the following:

- Travel speed of participants
- Potential for isolation while out on course
- Sight lines along trail (primarily affects single track)
- Travel off trail

8. Question: When is this requirement in effect?

Answer: The mandatory bear spray requirement is in effect May 1 to October 15, which is intended to correspond with the period of likely bear presence in the Bow Valley corridor.

9. Question: How am I to attach bear spray cans to my body (or bikes or packs) while racing?

Answer: While some event participants may not be familiar with carrying bear spray during a race, (and a few may be initially resistant to the requirement), there are many options for wearing a bear spray canister that allows for comfort, security and accessibility.

Best options:

Carry the bear spray on the body in an easy-to-access holster, harness, waist pack or open pocket. Carry the bear spray on the waist belt or inside an exterior "easy access" pocket of a backpack. (Bear spray should not be carried inside zippered or buckled pockets).

Mountain bike option:

Attach the bear spray to the bike, (i.e. inside a bottle cage). If they choose this option, event participants should understand that if they are separated from their bike they may not be able to reach their bear spray in the event of an encounter.

10. Question: What is the minimum size can of bear spray that is allowed? Is dog spray or mace suitable?

Answer: The minimum weight should be 224 grams with a minimum range of 2.4 metres (15ft) and with an expiry date that has not been exceeded. Dog spray and mace are not suitable due to their reduced effectiveness (in chemical composition and spray pattern, range and duration).

11. Question: Does this requirement apply if I am on these orienteering maps after the races?

Answer: Alberta Parks recommends all Park visitors carry bear spray with them while out on these orienteering maps. However, currently Alberta Parks does not have the authority to mandate this use by the general public including those who orienteer on these maps any time after the races.

12. Question: I've never used bear spray before, how will I know how to use it if necessary?

Answer: It is very important that you know how to use bear spray. Inform yourself before race day. The following resources on proper bear spray use are available:

- Read the instructions on the can and follow the manufacturer's directions.
- Go to <http://www.wildsmart.ca/>
- Go to this Parks Canada website: <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/mtn/ours-bears/secure-safety/gaz-spray.aspx>
- View this short instructional video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDgBY2PbnO4>
- Check out the "Bear Spray Information Board" (blue board) located near the main entrance of the CNCPP day lodge lobby.
- Attend the pre-race bear spray demonstration in the registration area prior to your first COC race

13. Question: I don't already own bear spray, what are my options?

- **Bear spray purchase:** Bear spray canisters can be purchased with your online COC registration. In addition they can be purchased at most outdoor stores for approximately \$40
- **Bear spray rental:** will be available through Trail Sports at CNCPP. These can be booked with your online COC registration.
- **Borrow a can from a friend** (make sure it has not expired)

14. Question: How do I carry bear spray during my race?

Answer: We recommend two options:

- *Bear Cozy* – a bear spray holder that fits directly into the water bottle holder on your waist-belt (or back pack or water bottle holder on your mountain bike). Available for purchase with your online registration for a special COC price of \$10. <http://www.bearcozy.com/>
- *Scat Belt* – a special waist belt designed to carry bear spray. Available for purchase with your online registration. <http://www.scatbelt.com/>