

Bear spray promotion week targets Yellowstone visitors

A Bozeman nonprofit is partnering with retailers around Yellowstone National Park to promote bear spray.

Keystone Conservation and seven retailers in communities near the park will sell bear spray at a discounted price and distribute bear safety information during the week of July 4.

“Many people, particularly area visitors, are unfamiliar with bear country and do not understand how important it is to carry bear spray, or how to use it,” Elisa Prescott, Keystone Conservation’s program coordinator, said in a news release. “We are working to increase awareness of the importance of carrying bear spray, and are offering opportunities for people to use bear spray.”

On Wednesday, Yellowstone National Park staff killed a black bear out of concern for people’s safety because the bear refused to leave a park campground after getting a taste of human food.

And since the beginning of April, 11 bears have been relocated in Montana due to human conflict, according to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Keystone, a people-predator coexistence group, is making the discount possible as part of its “Keep Calm and Carry Bear Spray” campaign. The campaign aims to educate people about bear spray and to make it more accessible. Keystone kicked off the campaign earlier this year at the Montana Outdoor Science School’s Watershed Festival, where attendees were able to practice discharging bear spray with inert cans.

“Bear spray will never replace the need for preventing bear encounters in the first place,” Prescott said. “But bear spray has been found to be fairly effective, and more effective than guns when someone is charged by a bear.”

Bear spray is expensive, typically in the \$45 range for an average-size can, and can’t be taken on airplanes, which inhibits visitors from carrying it. During the discount week, Northern Lights in Bozeman, for example, will offer bear spray for \$10 off its regular price from July 3 to July 7. Retailers in other locations will offer a discount from July 1 to July 7.

Along with providing awareness and education, Keystone has developed a bear spray rental program, currently available through Phasmid Rentals in Bozeman and Paddlefish in West Glacier.

In addition, Keystone’s BEAResponsible program helps people and bears coexist, keeping both humans and bears safe. The program focuses on teaching people to reduce

bear attractants in both residential areas and the backcountry.

Park officials advise hikers to stay in groups of three or more, make noise on the trail and carry bear spray. Updated bear safety information is available on the Yellowstone bear safety Web page and in the park newspaper, which is distributed at all park entrances. For more information about Keystone's programs, visit www.keystoneconservation.us or call 587-3389.