



## New Wilderness Food Storage Guidance



From left to right, canisters approved for use in these parks: Wild Ideas Bearikade, Bear Vault BV 250 & 300, Counter Assault Bear Keg, and Garcia Backpacker 812-C.

### New Recommendation in 2008

In 2008, these parks are **strongly recommending** that all campers carry all food, garbage, and toiletries in a park-approved bear-resistant food-storage container (canister or pannier). It is likely that a formal requirement to use these containers throughout all of the park wilderness area will replace this recommendation as early as 2009. In the meantime, the parks are making a concerted effort to remove broken and unused lockers from the wilderness.

**NOTE:** This recommendation is in addition to the existing requirements to carry and use park-approved, bear-resistant food-storage containers in three specified areas: 1) Rae Lakes Loop and vicinity 2) Dusy and Palisades Basins and 3) Rock Creek drainage.

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### Black bears and food

To preserve black bears in their natural state and to protect human safety, it is critical that all food be stored out of reach of bears.

Intelligent and curious, black bears (*Ursus americanus*) are highly motivated to find high-calorie food. In these parks, many bears have learned that the presence of humans means the presence of such food. Once bears obtain our food, they become increasingly bold, destructive, and potentially dangerous in their quest for more. The result can be disastrous human-bear interactions. Vacations are ruined when bears continually harass (and occasionally injure) campers. Sometimes bears destroy property. Such bears must be killed due to safety concerns.

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### A short history of food storage

At one time, backpackers slept with their food to keep bears away. Not only did bears figure this out, but it was dangerous. People switched to hanging food over a branch and tying the rope to the tree's trunk. After bears foiled this method, people hung food using the counter-balance technique, in which no rope is tied to the trunk. Again, bears found ways to obtain the food. They bit through branches, jumped down onto the food, and shook trees until one bag dropped low enough to reach. As a result, bears received food rewards for their efforts and our wild areas were left with broken branches and dangling ropes in tangled messes.

## **A short history of food storage (continued)**

Park managers tried alternatives to the counter-balance method, installing cables and poles in some wilderness areas where campers could hang food. While a good idea, these quickly proved difficult to maintain, were aesthetically undesirable, and, of course, were not always bear proof.

In the mid-1980s, a few metal food-storage lockers were placed in the wilderness as an experiment. By 1989, many more had been put in. Unlike other methods, bears could not obtain food from these lockers and bear-human incidents dramatically decreased. Unfortunately, other problems developed. The lockers require frequent maintenance and are not large enough to hold all of the food that people want to put in them. All too often, they are used for garbage which must then be hauled out by others. Lockers are also seen by many as an intrusion in the wilderness, where the “imprint” of humans is required to be minimal.

Through the years, portable canisters were designed, tested, and made commercially available. In 1991, only 1% of wilderness visitors carried these canisters. This increased to half of the wilderness users by 1999; even more use them today. While this trend is promising, human-bear incidents and injuries continue, leading these parks to require portable container use in a few areas starting in 2000. By 2003, portable containers became required in the Rae Lakes, Dusy Basin, and Rock Creek areas of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

With these requirements in place, incidents have continued to decrease. Despite that, in the past ten years in park wilderness areas bears seeking food have injured nine people. Three bears were put to death due to safety concerns related to their persistence in trying to obtain human food.

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### **How can I help preserve wilderness and wild bears?**

- When visiting wilderness, carry all of your food, garbage, and toiletries in a park-approved, bear-resistant food-storage container.
- Take all such items you won't need out of your vehicle before your trip. Put any such items that are in your car but you are not taking with you in the metal food-storage lockers provided at trailheads.
- In the frontcountry, use the food-storage lockers that are provided.
- Visit our website, [www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/bear\\_bc.htm](http://www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/bear_bc.htm), for ideas and information about how to efficiently pack a portable food container.
- Provide your input to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks regarding this recommendation. Go to [www.nps.gov/seki](http://www.nps.gov/seki) and click on “Contact Us.”

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You may also contact the Wilderness Office at 559-565-3766 or visit [www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/wilderness.htm](http://www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/wilderness.htm) for more information about visiting the Sequoia-Kings Canyon Wilderness.