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Punxsutawney Phil Predicts 6 More Weeks of Winter

FEBRUARY 02ND 2018 BY DEE LOFLIN

Punxsutawney Phil Predicts 6 More Weeks of Winter

The Groundhog has spoken! 6 more weeks of winter weather! Every February 2, all eyes turn to Gobbler's knob, a small Pennsylvania town as winter-weary Northeasterners await weather guidance from the predictive rodent.

It's a 132-year-old tradition that is held every year and conducted by top hat-donning members of the Inner Circle of the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club, according to the official Pennsylvania tourism website. The idea is, the groundhog wakes up from hibernation on the 2nd, and if it sees its shadow, there will be six more weeks of winter. If it doesn't, warmer weather is just around the corner.

This tradition started in Europe as Candlemas Day, an early Christian holiday involving candles. Germans who settled in Pennsylvania in the 1700s brought the custom to America.

Pennsylvania's Punxsutawney Phil is the most well known, but more than a dozen states celebrate with their own groundhogs, such as Georgia's General Beauregard Lee and Buckeye Chuck in Ohio.

Our own 69 year old box turtle, Murtle the Turtle, said it was still too cold to come out, but predicted that winter has not left Stoddard County just yet.

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MDC Encourages People to Help Prevent Wildfires

DECEMBER 06TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

[MDC Encourages People to Help Prevent Wildfires](#)

MDC encourages people to help prevent wildfires
The main cause of wildfires is improper burning of debris such as trash and brush piles.

Missouri- The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) reminds people that strong winds, low humidity, and dry conditions this time of year means extra caution is needed to avoid unexpected wildfires. According to MDC’s Forestry Division, the main cause of

wildfires is improper burning of debris such as leaves or brush piles.

“It’s been drier and warmer than usual, which means fires could get out of control very quickly,” said Forestry Field Program Supervisor Ben Webster. “We want everyone to check the weather and be extremely careful if they plan to burn leaves or debris.”

Each year, MDC staff work with fire departments around the state to help suppress numerous wildfires that can consume thousands of acres. MDC urges landowners, hunters, campers, and others in the outdoors to help prevent wildfires and offers the following tips.

OUTDOOR BURNING

Do not conduct outdoor burning during times when grasses, brush and other fire fuel are very dry, humidity is low and weather is windy. Dry fuel -- combined with high temperatures, low humidity and high winds -- makes fire nearly impossible to control. Check with local fire departments regarding local burn ordinances or burn bans that may be in place.

A person who starts a fire for any reason is responsible for any damage it may cause. Done properly, prescribed fire can be a beneficial tool to improve land for wildlife habitat and grazing. For more information on using prescribed fire as a land-management tool, visit mdc.mo.gov and search "Prescribed Fire."

DRIVING OFF ROAD

Wildfires can start when fine, dry fuel such as grass comes in contact with catalytic converters on motor vehicles.

Think twice before driving into and across a grassy field.

Never park over tall, dry grass or piles of leaves that can touch the underside of a vehicle. When driving vehicles off road, regularly inspect the undercarriage to ensure that fuel and brake lines are intact and no oil leaks are apparent.

Always carry an approved fire extinguisher on vehicles that are used off road.

Check for the presence of spark arresters on ATV exhausts.

MAKING A CAMPFIRE

Clear a generous zone around fire rings. When humidity is low and wind is high, debris can become tinder for a stray spark or ember.

Store unused firewood a good distance from the fire.

Never use gasoline, kerosene, or other flammable liquid to start a fire.
Keep campfires small and controllable.
Keep fire-extinguishing materials, such as a rake, shovel and bucket of water, close by.
Never leave a campfire unattended! Extinguish campfires each night and before leaving camp, even for a few moments.

SMOKERS: PRACTICE EXTRA CAUTION

Extinguish cigarettes completely and safely, and dispose of butts responsibly.

DON'T DELAY CALLING FOR HELP!

Call 911 at the first sign of a fire getting out of control.

REPORT FOREST ARSON

Many wildfires are set by vandals.
Help stop arson by calling Operation Forest Arson at 800-392-1111. Callers will remain anonymous and rewards are possible.

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MDC Reminder: Don't Feed Bears

SEPTEMBER 19TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

MDC Reminder: Don't Feed Bears

MDC reminder: Don't feed bears

MDC reminds people to "Be Bear Aware" by not feeding bears and providing potential sources of food.

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – As summer turns to fall, Missouri's estimated 350 native black bears enter a phase called *hyperphagia* in which they eat heavily, accumulating a layer of fat that results in a 30 percent weight gain preparing them for hibernation. In preparation for hibernation, bears eat a wide variety of food including grasses and forbs, berries, ants, bees and wasps, beetles, crickets, fish, frogs, small rodents and other small animals.

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) reminds people to "Be Bear Aware" by not feeding bears and providing potential sources of food.

"A fed bear is a dead bear," said MDC Wildlife Management Coordinator Alan Leary. "Feeding bears makes them comfortable around people and the places they associate with food from people, such as campsites, yards, and trash containers. When bears lose their fear of people by being fed, they may defend these food sources or territory. This can make them dangerous. When this happens, the bear has to be destroyed."

Leary added a fed bear that becomes a problem in one place cannot be relocated to another.

"Once a bear associates people with food, its life is ruined," Leary said. "Even if it is relocated, it will go in search of other places to get food from people, such as homes, residential areas, farms, and campsites. Common temptations include pet food or trash left outdoors, dirty grills or smokers, birdseed or other food at wildlife feeders, food at campsites, and gardens and orchards."

Avoid Attracting Black Bears

MDC offers these tips to avoid attracting black bears to possible food sources:

- Don't leave pet food sitting outside. Feed pets a portion they'll eat at each meal and remove the empty containers.
- Store garbage, recyclables, and compost inside a secure building or in a bear-proof container until the day of trash pick-up.
- Keep grills and smokers clean and store them inside.
- When camping be sure to keep cooking and cleaning areas separate from sleeping areas.
- Only use birdfeeders in bear country (which is primarily south of the Missouri River) when bears are typically hibernating -- from early December through early March -- or hang them at least 10 feet high and four feet away from any structure.
- Use electric fencing to keep bears away from beehives, chicken coops, vegetable gardens, orchards, and other potential food sources.
- Keep campsites clean and store all food, toiletries and trash in a secure vehicle or strung high between two trees. Do not burn or bury garbage or food waste.
- Report bear sightings by calling MDC at 573-522-4115, ext. 3080 or online at <http://bit.ly/2ya2lhe>.

Avoid Encounters and React Right

While close encounters with bears are uncommon in Missouri, MDC offers this advice when outdoors in black-bear country:

- Make noise while walking or hiking to prevent surprising a bear. Clap, sing, or talk loudly.
- Travel in a group if possible.
- Pay attention to the surroundings and watch for bear sign, such as tracks or claw or bite marks on trees.
- Keep dogs leashed.
- Leave a bear alone! Do not approach it. Make sure it has an escape route.
- If encountering a bear up close, back away slowly with arms raised to look larger. Speak in a calm, loud voice. Do not turn away from the bear. Back away slowly. Do not run.
- Report bear sightings by calling MDC at 573-522-4115, ext. 3080 or online at <http://bit.ly/2ya2lhe>.

When Hunting and Fishing

MDC offers this advice when hunting or fishing in bear country:

- Process or remove fish and game as quickly as possible, and alert others that there is game residue in the area.
- Keep a clean camp and store attractants where bears can't access them.

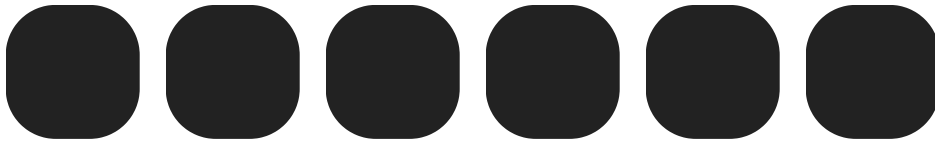
- Stay alert and aware of your surroundings while hunting or fishing.
- Report bear sightings by calling MDC at 573-522-4115, ext. 3080 or online at <http://bit.ly/2ya2lhe>.

A native of Missouri, black bears were abundant throughout the state until the late 1800s when they were nearly wiped out from unregulated killing and from habitat loss when Ozark forests were logged. MDC research shows that a small number of native black bears survived and others from Arkansas moved north into Missouri. Over time, their numbers increased and continue to do so. Results of ongoing black-bear research by MDC staff and others show that the animals have been sighted in about half the counties in Missouri, primarily south of the Missouri River, with most bears located in the southern third of the state in the Missouri Ozarks.

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Watch Solar Eclipse in Nature at MDC Areas

JULY 26TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

Watch Solar Eclipse in Nature at MDC Areas

**Watch solar eclipse in nature at MDC areas
See how nature reacts by watching at 54 MDC areas in prime path of Aug. 21 event.**

By Eleanor C. Hasenbeck, Missouri Department of Conservation

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. -- Discover some unique activities in nature during the upcoming total solar eclipse on Aug. 21 by watching the rare event at one of 54 Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) areas that lie in the solar eclipse's primary path across Missouri.

During the eclipse, visitors at these conservation areas can enjoy regular outdoor activities -- such as fishing, hiking, and wildlife watching -- in a far-from-regular way for a few minutes when the moon passes in front of the sun. The eclipse will also bring a rare chance for those watching wildlife to catch out-of-the-ordinary behaviors.

"Daylight is a cue for birds throughout their day to wake up in the morning and return to roost at night," said MDC State Ornithologist Sarah Kendrick. "As the sky becomes darker during the eclipse, some birds may become confused by the lack of light and could exhibit odd behaviors such as going quiet, thinking that night is falling."

Many of the featured MDC areas also offer an escape from crowded cities and light pollution, and all of the recommended areas have restrooms for visitor convenience.

While all areas are free to access and open to the public, some may require visitors to obtain a special-use permit for group camping.

Don't forget to bring solar-eclipse-approved glasses for viewing the event!

For many Missourians, this total solar eclipse will be a once-in-a-lifetime event. The last total eclipse visible in the Show-Me State occurred in 1869. The next total solar eclipse will only be visible in parts of southern Missouri and will occur in April 2024.

According to NASA, during a total eclipse, the moon passes between the sun and the earth, blocking its light and allowing viewers to see the sun’s outer atmosphere, the corona. The moon casts a shadow, called an umbra, onto the earth. Communities in the path of totality will experience a few minutes of temperature drop and dimmed sunlight similar to twilight as the umbra passes over them.

Communities will experience totality at different times as the moon moves across the sky, but the first Missourians to see it will be those in St. Joseph around 1:04 p.m. The umbra will then cross central Missouri before totality occurs near Cape Girardeau around 1:20 p.m.

For an interactive map of the eclipse’s path across Missouri, approximate times to watch, a full list of recommended conservation areas for viewing, and details on each area, visit the MDC website at mdc.mo.gov/eclipse. A printable map is also available at the bottom of the webpage.

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MDC Asks Public Not to Plant Invasive Bradford Pear Trees

MAY 30TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

MDC Asks Public Not to Plant Invasive Bradford Pear Trees

The invasive Bradford pear tree can cause problems for Missouri native plants and animals.

Missouri - The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) encourages homeowners and landscapers to avoid planting Callery pear trees this spring.

Better known as Bradford pears, the Callery pear tree is an invasive species known to multiply quickly and crowd out Missouri native plants. While it's been a popular landscaping tree for decades, cultivated forms have spread aggressively throughout the state.

"Different varieties of Bradford pear trees were planted close to each other, which allowed them to cross pollinate and take over natural areas," said Forestry Field Program Supervisor Russell Hinnah. "But they're also a poor landscaping choice because they don't do well in storms, often losing limbs or splitting apart."

Stopping the spread means selecting alternate trees for yards and forested property.

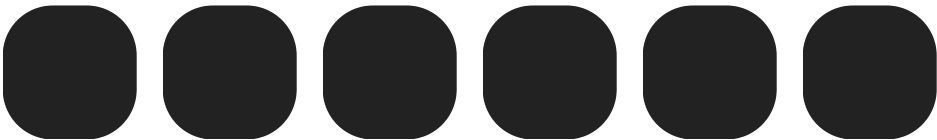
"The best plan is to select a native species to Missouri, and there are several great options," said Hinnah. "Serviceberry trees produce similar showy white blooms in the spring and have small red fruits that attract wildlife."

Eastern redbuds and Missouri’s state tree, the flowering dogwood, are also good alternatives. The redbud tree grows quickly with eye-catching lavender flowers in the spring. Dogwoods do best in shady areas but can be somewhat difficult to grow.

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