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**Blue Ridge Parkway**  
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## **Blue Ridge Parkway News Release**

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### **Temporary Closing of Craggy Gardens Picnic Area**

(Asheville, NC)—Blue Ridge Parkway officials announce the temporary closure of the Craggy Gardens Picnic Area at Milepost 367.6 until at least Labor Day weekend, September 4, 2009. The closure began Friday, August 21 because of bear activity in the area.

The problems with bear at Craggies began in mid-July, when park maintenance staff found food pulled out of a dumpster. "Soon thereafter, we began seeing bear during the day. Bears were completely unafraid of people by early August," said Doc Cross, a maintenance employee who often works at Craggy Gardens. "Three or four bears were regularly raiding the dumpster," Cross said.

The dumpster at Craggies had a broken latch, and park rangers observed bears opening the dumpster and getting in to get food. The dumpster has been removed.


It is relatively unusual for the park to close a picnic area, but "This is an unusual year," said District Ranger Tim Francis. "If we can keep food away from bears by closing the picnic areas, then we have a chance to keep both people and bear healthy and alive," said Francis. Park officials hope that bear will move out of the picnic area by Labor Day weekend so it can be reopened. "We won't know for sure, though, until we get closer to the long weekend," said Francis.

"We're advising people to be really careful with the food in their campgrounds and while picnicking, making sure they store food in their vehicles," said Bambi Teague, Chief of Resource Management and Science. Though we have closed only the Craggy Gardens Picnic Area, we are having problems all along the 469 mile parkway. "We want visitors to fully comprehend that when they feed bears, whether accidentally or on purpose, they kill bears." Bears that become unafraid of humans will walk right up to people expecting food. The closer the bear get to people, the greater chance we have that someone will get hurt. When bears become unafraid of people, sometimes the only option we have is to kill them." Earlier in the month a bear made physical contact with a picnicker at Craggies and was later killed by euthanasia.

One reason for the increased bear sightings is because the area's black bears are coming unusually close to humans to forage for food. Their food supplies are low right now, and people are leaving food out. The bear population is also on the rise.

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A culvert trap has been placed in the picnic area in hopes of capturing and releasing bear, thereby reinforcing its fear of humans.

Parkway visitors are reminded to keep all campsites and picnic areas clean and store food in containers locked in vehicles. Grills should also be removed of any food remains. Food or garbage should never be stored in tents or left unattended on picnic tables.

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