

Lions, Tigers, Bears – and Climate Change

How a warming planet has led to growing numbers of human-animal conflicts

Human-wildlife conflict is increasing across the country as state wildlife agencies struggle to keep up, according to a growing body of research. A surge in urban deer populations has triggered [millions of deer-vehicle crashes a year](#). Snakes are [showing up more frequently](#) on some US beaches and are [more likely](#) to bite humans as temperatures increase.

Previous research has already pointed to the ways [climate change](#) alters natural food sources and animal behavior. The latest, a report by [University of Washington](#) researchers, noted that a warming world was increasing human-wildlife conflicts.

"We found evidence of conflicts between people and wildlife exacerbated by climate change on six continents, in five oceans, in terrestrial systems, in marine systems, in freshwater systems — involving mammals, reptiles, birds, fish and even invertebrates," says lead author Briana Abrahms. "Although each case has its own causes and effects, climate-driven conflicts are ubiquitous."

To identify trends, the team pored over published, peer-reviewed incidents of human-wildlife conflicts and identified cases that were linked specifically to the effects of climate change. These include short-term climate events — such as droughts — and longer-term changes.

An increase in human conflicts with bears may be the most pressing. A 2024 [survey](#) by the International Association for Bear Research and Management found that 18 states reported an increase in human-black bear interactions over a five-year period ending in 2022. Those states were: Alabama, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Idaho, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, and Virginia.

The same study found that eight states recorded an increase in humans killed or injured by black bears over the same period: California, Connecticut, Florida, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Vermont. Only two states recorded a decrease: New Mexico and Alaska.

Reporting plan: An article would examine the ways in which our climate shuffle is pushing animals closer to humans and leading to more dangerous interactions.

Suggested Interviews:

- One or more people who were attacked by bears and survived
- Another person who had a car accident involving a deer

- Dr. Briana Abrahms from the University of Washington and an expert in climate-related human-animal conflicts (I will ask her for other experts in her field)
- A representative of the International Association for Bear Research and Management
- A park ranger