

## Hurricanes, Tornadoes, and Bears—Oh My!

Many summer camps have dealt with a variety of natural disasters ranging from massive forest fires to hurricanes and tornadoes. Now many camps have two new problems to manage: wildlife encroachment due to loss of habitat and damaged trees inviting insect infestation.

At one of Markel's western programs, a single hiker was killed by what is suspected to be a grizzly bear or mountain lion (the body was never recovered, but recent fires in the region significantly reduced feeding habitats).

Encourage campers and staff to always stay together during offsite camping trips and hikes. Contact the Forest Service or your local Fish and Wildlife department before trips to determine if there are areas to avoid due to wildlife or fire damage. If bears are hanging around your camp, ask the game warden to relocate them immediately. The area around dumpsters can be dangerous at night. Keep in mind that bears aren't the only animals that may relocate to your camp. Most of these animals are looking for food, and summer droughts may encourage animals to move into new territories. The wet spring season in the west has resulted in a significant population explosion in rodents, which in turn has increased the snake population. What do 12 to 14 year old boys do when they find a snake, poisonous or not?

Tree damage from natural disasters is a more complex and expensive problem to manage. Most camps simply can't afford to remove all the damaged trees, so they must set priorities for those around buildings and activity areas. Not all damage shows up immediately, so removing trees could be long-term project.

Replanting can also be an expensive, long-term project, but it is important to consider not only for the beauty of trees but also to reduce erosion. Some camps might try a fund-raising event ("Buy a tree and your spirit will live at camp for a hundred years"). Talk with an arborist or landscape architect about what trees might be best for your site. A new apple orchard could inspire new camp activities. Take the time to walk through your camp before fall and examine which trees might need to be removed before they cause damage during a natural disaster.