

## Fatal Black Bear Attack in the Cherokee National Forest

April 13, 2006

Susan Cenkus, 45, and two of her children, Luke, 2 and Elora Petrasek, 6, were attacked by a black bear while visiting the Cherokee National Forest southeast Tennessee. Six year old Elora was killed during the attack and both Susan and Luke were seriously injured.

Susan, a nurse from Clyde, Ohio and her children, Luke Elora were in the area to visit Susan's oldest son who is attending school at Lee University in Cleveland.

Susan took the two youngest children to Benton Falls, a popular destination in the the Cherokee National Forest, not far from Cleveland. As they were leaving the area around the waterfalls a bear was sighted near the trail. As adults tried to scare the bear away it ran in and grabbed two year old Luke Cenkus by the head.

Susan used rocks and sticks to try to get the bear to let go of Luke. When bear dropped Luke, it attacked Susan, dragging her into the forest.

Other people hiking in the area joined in and drove the bear away from Susan. However, sometime during the panic of the attack, 6 year old Elora apparently ran off into the woods or down the trail.

When they realized Elora was missing a frantic search of the area was immediately started. By the time Danny Stinnett was able to find her, the black bear was standing over her lifeless body she was approximately 80 yards away with.

He shot at the bear twice a .380 pistol. The bear abandon it post and ran off into the woods.

As people pulled together to help during the tragedy one person was able to get a cell phone call out for help while another got to a car and went to the closest ranger station to report the incident.

Susan and Luke were flown by helicopter to nearby Chattanooga hospital where both were listed in serious condition and had to undergo surgery.

Members of the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) and National Forest Service converged on the area and set traps and snares in the area to catch the bear.

On the second day TWRA found tracks near one of the traps, but no bear. On the third day a male black bear was found in a live trap in the area of the attack. The bear was subsequently euthenized and it's body taken to the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine. It's brain was been removed and tests determined the bear did not have rabies.

The necropsy was preformed by performed on April 17 under the direction of Dr. Robert Donnell, UT Vet School. No conclusive evidence was found that this was the bear involved in the fatal attack.

The TWRA is continuing to monitor the traps and at this point DNA may have to be relied upon to determine whether this is, or is not the bear involved in last weeks attack.