

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
Fish and Wildlife Service  
50 CFR Part 17

Endangered and Threatened  
Wildlife and Plants; Notice  
of Finding on a Petition to  
List the Florida Black Bear

Agency: Fish & Wildlife  
Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of finding on  
petition.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Fish and  
Wildlife Service announces a  
90-day petition finding for  
a petition to amend the List  
of Endangered and Threatened  
Wildlife by adding the  
Florida black bear (*Ursus  
americanus floridanus*) as a  
threatened species.  
Substantial information has  
been presented to indicate  
that the petitioned action  
may be warranted. Comments  
and information pertaining  
to this notice are sought  
from the public.

DATES: The finding announced  
in this notice was made in  
September 1990. Comments and  
information may be submitted  
until further notice.

ADDRESSES: Information,  
comments, or questions  
should be sent to the Field  
Supervisor, Jacksonville  
Field Office, Fish and  
Wildlife Service, 3100  
University Boulevard South,  
suite 120, Jacksonville,  
Florida 32216.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION  
CONTACT: David J. Wesley,  
Field Supervisor, at the  
above address (telephone  
904/791-2580 or FTS 946-  
2580).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Section 4(b)(3)(A) of the  
Endangered Species Act of  
1973, as amended in 1982 (16  
U.S.C. 1531 et seq.),  
requires that the Service  
make a finding on whether a  
petition to list, delist, or  
reclassify a species

presents substantial  
scientific or commercial  
information to demonstrate  
that the petitioned action  
may be warranted. To the  
maximum extent practicable,  
this finding is to be made  
within 90 days of the  
receipt of the petition, and  
the finding is to be  
published promptly in the  
Federal Register. If the  
finding is positive, the  
Service is also required to  
promptly commence a review  
of the species.

In a letter dated May 20,  
1990, and received by the  
Service on June 11, 1990,  
Ms. Ingeborg Hutchison of  
Lake Geneva, Florida,  
petitioned the Service to  
list the Florida black bear  
(*Ursus americanus  
floridanus*) as a threatened  
species. The petition cites  
the following factors as  
threats to the Florida black  
bear: (1) Illegal hunting by  
beekeepers, gall-bladder  
poachers, and others; (2)  
loss and fragmentation of  
critical habitat; (3)  
hunting pressure; and (4)  
road mortality.

According to Hall (1981),  
the Florida black bear is  
primarily restricted to  
Florida, with its range  
extending into Georgia (the  
Okefenokee Swamp area) and  
southern Alabama,  
terminating just about at  
the Alabama-Mississippi  
State line. Westward, the  
Florida black bear is  
replaced by the Louisiana  
black bear (*U. a. luteolus*);  
that subspecies was proposed  
for Federal listing as a  
threatened species on June  
21, 1990 (55 FR 25341).  
North of its range, the  
Florida black bear is  
replaced by the eastern  
black bear (*U. a.  
americanus*), the most  
widespread of the 16  
currently recognized  
subspecies of black bear.

The Florida black bear is  
listed as threatened by the  
Florida Game and Fresh Water  
Fish Commission (section 39-  
27.003-005, Florida

Administrative Code), with  
the exceptions of bears in  
Baker and Columbia Counties  
and Apalachicola National  
Forest, where the threatened  
designation does not apply  
and where regulated hunts  
are allowed. The subspecies  
is also considered  
threatened by the Florida  
Committee on Rare and  
Endangered Plants and  
Animals, based on habitat  
loss (Williams 1978). The  
Georgia Division of Game and  
Fish currently allows  
limited hunting of the  
Florida black bear in the 5  
counties adjoining the  
Okefenokee Swamp, where a  
healthy population of 600 to  
700 bears is believed to  
exist. The Alabama Division  
of Game and Fish considers  
the black bear to be a game  
species, but no open season  
currently is permitted due  
to the low number of black  
bears in that State. The  
main population is  
restricted to rivers and  
swamps north of Mobile Bay.

The Service included the  
Florida black bear as a  
category 2 candidate for  
listing in its December 30,  
1982 (47 FR 58454) and  
September 18, 1985 (50 FR  
37958) vertebrate notices of  
review, and in its January  
6, 1989 (54 FR 554) animal  
notice of review. These  
notices include animals  
which are considered  
candidates for listing as  
endangered or threatened  
species. Category 2  
candidates are those for  
which a listing proposal is  
possibly appropriate, but  
for which conclusive data on  
biological vulnerability and  
threat are not currently  
available to support such a  
proposal. Category 2 species  
are actively under review  
for potential listing.

Before deciding whether  
or not to propose the  
listing of the Florida black  
bear as an endangered or  
threatened species, the  
Service needs further  
information on the  
conservation status of the  
Florida black bear. Further

information about the taxonomic status of this species is also of interest. During the review of the Louisiana black bear for proposed listing, it was suggested by one authority that the Louisiana and Florida black bears, and possibly other southeastern coastal plain bear populations, may constitute a single subspecies.

[FR Doc. 90-24625 Filed 10-17-90; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-55-M

Despite the need for further information, the Service has determined that Ms. Hutchinson's petition, combined with other available data, provides substantial information indicating that the requested action may be warranted. The Service would appreciate any additional relevant data, comments, and suggestions from the public, governmental agencies, the scientific community, or any interested party concerning potential listing of the Florida black bear.

#### Author

This notice was prepared by Dr. Michael M. Bentzien (see ADDRESSES section above).

#### References

Hall, E.R. 1981. The mammals of North America. Vol. II:

#### Authority

The Authority for this action is the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.).

List of Subjects in 50 CFR  
Part 17

Endangered and threatened species, Exports, Imports, Reporting and record keeping requirements, and Transportation.

Dated: October 12, 1990.

Bruce Blanchard,

Acting Director, Fish and  
Wildlife Service.