

FLORIDA STATUS REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Black bears occur in several functionally disjunct populations in Florida. They are classified as a game species in two areas in northern Florida, but bears are listed by the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission as a threatened species throughout the rest of the state.

Several changes in personnel working on black bears have occurred. Tom Hardisky left the bear project and was replaced by Mark Cantrell. Unfortunately, Mark has been lured from Florida, as was Tom, for a job in his home state.

HARVEST INFORMATION

Black bears can be legally harvested in Apalachicola National Forest and in Baker and Columbia counties. The season limit is one bear per hunter. Typically, hunters kill 40-50 bears annually. Bears weighing less than 45.5 kg (100 lbs.) are protected, as are females with cubs. The preferred method of take is with trained hounds. All harvested bears must be checked within 24 hours after being killed. Sex, weight, and a premolar tooth are collected from each harvested bear.

MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Hunting will begin later in the year during the 1990-91 season. The intent of that shift is to reduce the harvest of pregnant females. This technique has been successfully used in other southern states and we anticipate it will be effective in Florida.

Other than the harvest, management of bears focuses on two issues. One is responding to nuisance complaints, and the second pertains to mitigation in areas where development threatens bear habitat. Most nuisance complaints are from apiary damage. We continue to handle the complaints successfully by trapping and releasing the bear at the apiary site. Mitigating development is a more difficult problem considering the rapid rate with which human population in Florida is increasing. Some gains are being made in habitat protection, and a proposed land acquisition program should increase the land permanently secured from development.

RESEARCH PROGRAMS

A telemetry study on bears in Ocala National Forest was completed in 1988. Plans are underway to begin in 1990 a study on bears in the Apalachicola National Forest. A recently completed study identified bear highway crossings; the information was sought to guide recommendations to reduce the impact of a new highway project.

RECENT LITERATURE

- Wooding, J. B., and T. S. Hardisky. 1988. Black bear habitat study. Final performance report. Fla. Game and Fresh Water Fish Comm. 37 pp.
- _____, A. L. Hunter, and T. S. Hardisky. 1988. Trap and release apiary-raiding black bears. Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 42:333-336.