

FLORIDA STATUS REPORT

JOHN B. WOODING, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission 4005 S. Main St.,
Gainesville, FL 32601, Phone: (904) 336-2230

INTRODUCTION

The four major concentrations of black bears in Florida occur in and around Apalachicola National Forest (N.F.), Osceola N.F., and Ocala N.F., all located in northern Florida, and in and around Big Cypress National Preserve, located in southwestern Florida. Black bears are classified as a game species in Apalachicola and Osceola N.F.'s and on the private land in Baker and Columbia Counties. Elsewhere in Florida, bears are listed by the state as a threatened species.

There have been several personnel changes in the last 2 years. Mark Cantrell left the Game Commission for Federal employment. He is now working for the Department of

Defense on Ft. Bragg Military Reservation in North Carolina. Mark's position was filled by Steve Selbert, a former student of Mike Pelton's at the University of Tennessee. Steve is conducting a study of black bears in the Apalachicola N.F. Dave Maehr, who recently returned to working on black bears, is conducting a study of the black bear in the Big Cypress region of southern Florida.

HARVEST

The total harvest of black bears in Florida from 1981-91 is presented by management unit in Table 1. New season dates took effect for each unit in the 1990 season. On Apalachicola N.F., the season was reduced from 14 to 12 days and shifted from a beginning date in late October to a beginning date in late November.

These changes were made to reduce hunting pressure on females. On Osceola N.F., the muzzleloading gun season and

| YEAR | APALACHICOLA N.F. BAKER/COLUMBIA: | OSCEOLA N.F. BAKER/COLUMBIA: | PRIVATE LAND STATEWIDE | TOTAL* |
|------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|--------|
| 1981 | 16- 8M: 8F | 9- 6M: 3F | 7- 5M: 1F | 32 |
| 1982 | 3- 2M: 1F | 101- 6M: 3F | 241- 14M: 6F | 37 |
| 1983 | 16- 5M: 11F | 9- 6M: 3F | 10- 5M: 5F | 35 |
| 1984 | 26- 15M: 11F | 1- /M: 1F | 19- 17M: 2F | 48 |
| 1985 | 23- 9M: 14F | 7- 5M: 2F | 38- 27M: 11F | 68 |
| 1986 | 20- 12M: 8F | 14- 7M: 7F | 17- 17M: /F | 51 |
| 1987 | 18- 12M: 6F | 4- 1M: 3F | 23- 15M: 8F | 45 |
| 1988 | 18- 13M:SF | 0- /M: /F | 23- 17M: 6F | 41 |
| 1989 | 34- 27M: 7F | 3- 2M: 1F | 23- 17M: 6F | 60 |
| 1990 | 161- 11M: 4F | 1- 1M: /F | 22- 18M: 4F | 39 |
| 1991 | 27- 24M: 3F | 2- 2M: /F | 31- 24M: 7F | 60 |

* Total includes animals of unknown sex.

Table 1. Number of harvested black bears checked by hunters in Florida.: 1981 -91.

still-hunting season were eliminated. The 9-day bear season, the only season on Osceola in which the use of dogs was legal to hunt bears, was moved from November to January. These measures were taken to drastically reduce bear hunting pressure. On private land in Baker and Columbia Counties, the 58-day bear season was shifted from a beginning date in mid-November to a beginning date in late November. The purpose for delaying the season was to reduce hunting pressure on females.

MANAGEMENT

The most significant news to report regarding bear management is the proposed listing of the Florida black bear as a federally threatened species. The range of the Florida black bear (*U.a.floridanus*) includes all of Florida and the southern portions of Georgia and Alabama. In 1990, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service received a petition from a Florida citizen to list the Florida black bear as a federally designated threatened species. The Service's findings, published in the Federal Register (Volume 56, No. 4, 01/07/1992, pp. 586-590), were that "the petition to list the Florida black bear as a threatened species is warranted but precluded by work on other species having a higher priority for listing." (p. 599). The Service considered that the factors threatening the bear - habitat destruction, road mortality, hunting, and poaching - were moderate to low magnitude threats and that other species scheduled for listing which face more high magnitude threats should be addressed prior to the bear. The Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish

Commission concurred with the Service's findings.

RESEARCH

Three black bear research projects, all conducted by biologists with Florida Game and Fish, are currently under way. A telemetry study in the Apalachicola N.F. is collecting information on habitat use, movements, and legal hunting mortality. In southern Florida, a second telemetry study is under way that will provide data on the life history and management needs of the isolated black bear population in and around the Big Cypress National Preserve. The third study is collecting biological information post mortem from bears which died from causes other than legal hunting.

RECENT LITERATURE

- Breault, T.A. 1992. Florida black bear harvest summary. Fla. Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. Tallahassee.
- Wooding, J.B. and T.S. Hardisky. 1992. Black bear denning in northcentral Florida. J. Mammal. 73: In Press.
- Wooding, J.B. and T.S. Hardisky. In Press. Home range and habitat use of black bears in northcentral Florida. Int. Conf. Bear Res. and Manage. 9:00-00.
- Wooding, J.B., S.M. Shea, M.L. Richardson, and D.Y. Dowling. 1992. Movements of a female black bear in northwestern Florida. Fla. Field Nat. 20: In Press.