

FLORIDA STATUS REPORT

JOHN B. WOODING, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, 4005 S. Main St., Gainesville, FL 32601

INTRODUCTION

Eight black bear populations occur in Florida isolated from each other by habitat loss. Statewide population size is estimated at 1000-1500 bears.

HARVESTS

The 1993-94 season marked the last year of legal bear hunting in Florida. Hunters killed 62 black bears, 30 in Apalachicola National Forest and 32 on privately owned forest in Baker and Columbia counties (Table 1). Three of the 62 bears were females.

Table 1. Black bear harvests on Apalachicola National Forest and private land in Baker and Columbia counties, 1984-93.

Hunt Year	Baker and Columbia Counties			Apalachicola National Forest		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1984-85	19	17	2	26	15	11
1985-86	38	27	11	23	9	14
1986-87	17	17	0	20	12	18
1987-88	23	15	8	18	12	6
1988-89	23	17	6	18	13	5
1989-90	23	17	6	34	27	7
1990-91	22	15	4	16	11	4
1991-92	31	24	7	27	24	3
1992-93	13	12	1	9	9	0
1993-94	32	29	3	30	30	0

This was the second year in which it was illegal to kill a bear weighing less than 200 pounds (the former weight limit was 100 pounds). In 1992-93, the first year of the 200-pound limit, hunters killed 22 bears. In 1993-94, they killed 62 bears, or roughly three times the previous year's total. There are three reasonable explanations for the high kill this past season:

1. There was increased hunting pressure because 1993-94 was the last season, leading to more hunter effort.
2. Bears were unusually vulnerable to hunters because of the drought - normally flooded areas were dry this season and thus accessible to hunters and their hounds.

3. More bears that weighed at least 200 pounds were available because of the previous year's protection of bears weighing <200 pounds.

Two of the bears killed in Apalachicola N.F. were captive reared cubs. They had been released in the National Forest in 1989 when they were about 10 months old. They survived four years after release.

MANAGEMENT

The Commission on October 1, 1993 adopted a black bear management plan. The stated goal for black bears is to perpetuate the species in the state. Strategies include conserving habitat and minimizing human induced mortality. Habitat conservation efforts will focus on the five largest populations in the state. The objective is to protect up to 1 million acres in each area.

PERSONNEL

Steve Seibert left the Commission for a job with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Jacksonville, Florida. Dave Maehr, who was completing a bear study in southern Florida, left the Commission for employment with an environmental consulting firm. Jayde Roof moved to central Florida to begin a new bear study in the Orlando area.

RESEARCH

Three studies are underway: one on bear ecology in southern Florida, the second with bear acceptance of a wildlife highway underpass in Central Florida, and the third on black bear diseases and parasites. A fourth study, expected to begin this year, will examine the ecology of bears on Eglin Air Force Base in the Florida panhandle. The study will be a cooperative effort between the U.S. Air Force, the University of Florida, and the University of Tennessee.