

FLORIDA STATUS REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Eight black bear populations occur in Florida, isolated from each other by habitat loss. Statewide population size is estimated at 1000-1500 bears. The Florida black bear is listed as a threatened species by the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission (GFC) and is a candidate for federal listing as a threatened species.

HARVEST INFORMATION

The 1993-1994 season was the last year of legal bear hunting in Florida.

MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

The Commission adopted a black bear management plan in 1993. One of the recommendations in the plan called for the creation of a management committee for each of the largest bear populations in the state. The first of these committees was organized in 1995 for the Apalachicola bear population. The members included agency employees, private foresters, and members of private environmental organizations.

The committee completed a report in September, 1995 on habitat management guidelines for the Apalachicola population.

The Commission recently began an initiative in southern Florida to conserve privately owned habitat in the range of the Florida panther. The actions, although focused on panthers, will directly benefit the black bears that live within the panther's range.

An evaluation of a black bear highway crossing was completed in 1995. The crossing was a concrete box culvert with the following dimensions: 14.3 m long, 7.3 m wide, and 2.4 m tall. Barrier fencing (3 m chain-link topped with three strands of barbed wire) extended 0.6 km to the west and 1.1 km to the east of the crossing. Five bears used the crossing to cross S.R.46 during the study. Bears encountered the fence or wildlife crossing a total of 50 times between December, 1994 and December, 1995. No bears went over or under the fence, but two walked around the ends where they then crossed the highway. At least eleven other species used the crossing to make 278 highway crossings. Most crossings were made by rabbits, raccoons, armadillos, opossums, and gray foxes.

RESEARCH PROGRAMS

A Florida black bear health study from data collected statewide is currently being drafted by Dr. Mike Dunbar of the GFC. The GFC is also conducting a study on the feasibility of stocking bears in the Big Bend Region of the state. Two other studies are underway in Florida: one on the ecology of bears on the Elgin Air Force Base in the Florida panhandle, the second on ecology of bears in the Oseola and Okefenokee swamp in northeast Florida. These studies involve a cooperative effort between the University of Florida and the University of Tennessee.

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