

STATUS REPORT FOR FLORIDA

James R. Brady, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission Jimmie C. McDaniel, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission

In Florida the black bear is classified as threatened but it is still legally hunted in the Apalachicola National Forest and in Columbia and Baker Counties (includes the Osceola National Forest) (See Figure 1). These hunted areas possess extensive blocks of suitable bear habitat and support populations which apparently can sustain an annual harvest. Bear habitat in the remainder of the state is being lost continually and remnants of the original statewide population are scattered, mainly in areas inaccessible to man. These additional inhabited areas include the northeast coast from the Georgia border to Seminole County, the Gulf Coastal hammocks from St. Marks River to Tarpon Springs and the Big Cypress Swamp (See Figure 1).

Reliable population density and trend data are not available, however, hunter success figures (Appendix A) suggest stable populations on the Apalachicola and Osceola Wildlife Management Areas (National Forests).

To date the black bear has received very little attention in Florida. The bear is a relatively unimportant game species, and public interest has been largely restricted to a few local groups of bear hunters. Research efforts have generally suffered from a lack of budgetary and/or man-power commitments.

Recently, however, there has been increased interest in the management of black bears in Florida. Various conservation organizations and individuals as well as the state's Endangered Species Technical Advisory Committee have become concerned about the status of the black bear. They have strongly urged the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission to mount a serious research effort to obtain a sound data base from which to manage the species. In response, the Commission has undertaken a preliminary study of black bears in the Osceola National Forest and is developing long range plans for a comprehensive state-wide investigation.

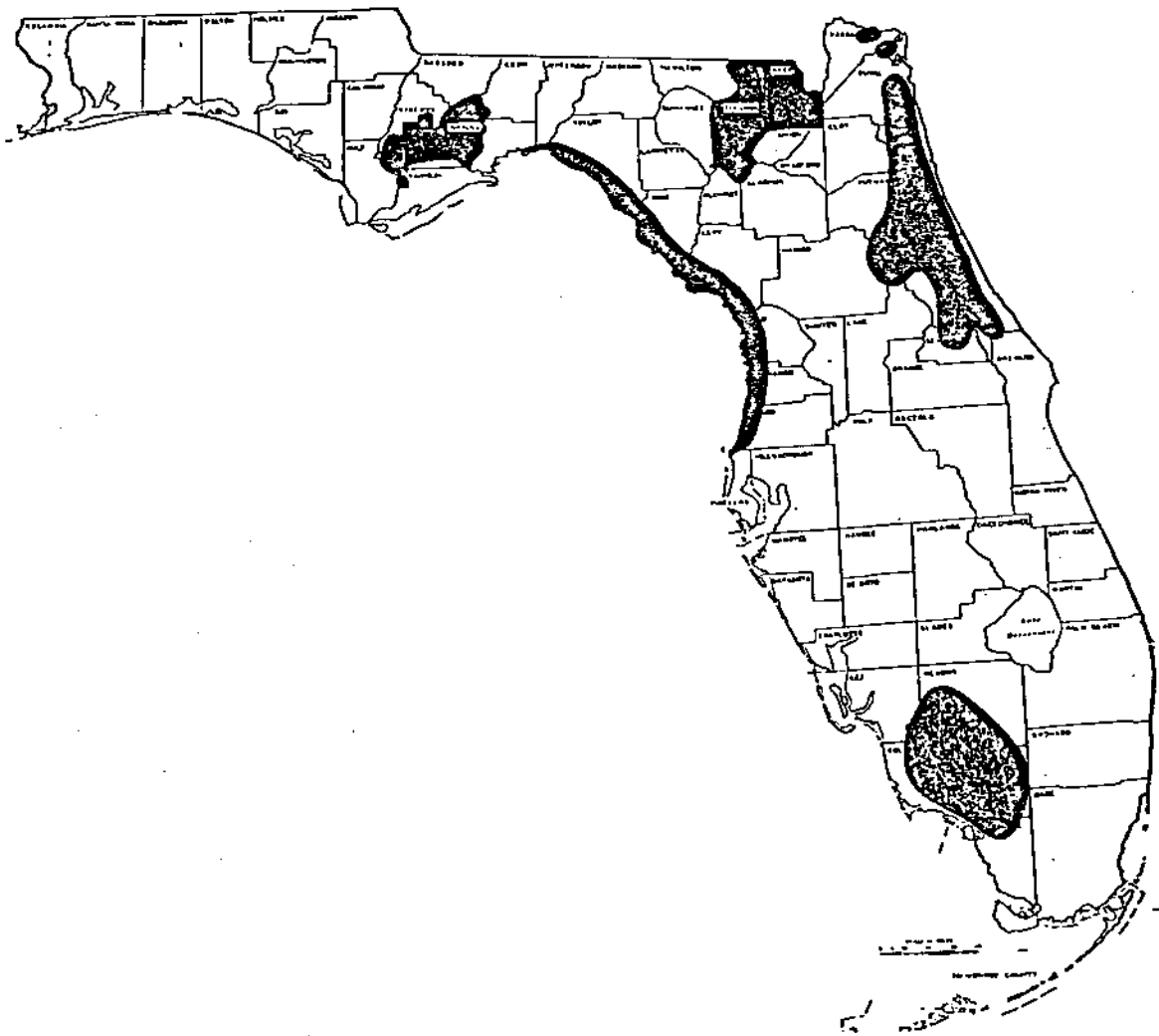
HARVEST | INFORMATION ON

On the Apalachicola and Osceola Wildlife Management Areas black bears may be taken with the aid of dogs during special hunts in September and October. In recent years these hunts have varied from 16-30 days in length on the Apalachicola Wildlife Management Area. Three, 3-day hunts are conducted on the Osceola Wildlife Management Area. Both areas require a \$10.00 special permit in addition to a hunting license.

Bear may also be taken on the Osceola Wildlife Management Area during the annual deer season (2nd weekend in November through the first weekend in January), however dogs may be used only on certain areas during that time. In Columbia and Baker Counties outside the Osceola Wildlife Management

FIGURE 1

Major Inhabited Black Bear Range



STATUS REPORT FOR FLORIDA

Area, bears may be hunted with dogs during the annual deer season.

Bear cubs weighing less than 100 pounds and sows with cubs are protected.

Hunt data from recent years are presented in Appendix A.

MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Aside from the hunting of black bear described in the previous section, the only ongoing bear management activity involves the trapping and relocation of nuisance individuals. Currently there is no statewide policy governing the handling of nuisance bears, therefore, it is handled differently from case to case. As a result, meaningful data is scarce and evaluations of the efforts are difficult.

RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Bears have been instrumented and monitored in and adjacent to the Apalachicola National Forest since 1975. One individual, a four-year old, 150 pound male was monitored from April, 1975 to February, 1976. The movements of this bear indicated a home range of 12,000 acres. Hibernation did not occur, but short periods of "holing up" in beds for two weeks or less were detected during the winter months.

During 1977, two additional bears were radio-instrumented and monitored for several months. However, due to insufficient funding the study was terminated.

Between fall, 1976 and fall, 1977, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service conducted an investigation of the potential environmental impact of phosphate mining in the Osceola National Forest. That investigation involved the radio-instrumentation of fifteen black bears within the forest.

When the impact study was terminated in the fall of 1977, approximately ten of the transmitters were still operating.

Since the Commission was already developing plans for a long term black bear habitat study, the situation was recognized as an opportunity to begin the study immediately with a minimum of cost.

The objectives of this preliminary segment are to: 1) identify and describe the cubbing habitat of black bear; 2) describe the temporal and spatial patterns of habitat use with special emphasis on identifying critical aspects of bear habitat; and 3) develop expertise in dealing with black bears to facilitate long range research planning.

Regarding our long term black bear research, the principal areas of need are the restoration of black bear to suitable yet currently unstocked range; develop the technology and/or legislation needed to control the black bear-beekeeper conflict; and establishing biological criteria to insure sustained yield harvesting where hunting is allowed.

Appendix A
 Florida Black Bear
 Hunt Data

Apalachicola Wildlife Management Area

Year	Dates	Special Hunts		
		No. of Days Open	No. Killed	Man-Days
1974-75	9/28-10/20	23	9	2,542
1975-76	9/29-11/1	30	14	2,970
1976-77	9/18-10/3	16	7	2,571
1977-78	9/25/10/16	21	12	2,571

Osceola Wildlife Management Area

Special Hunts

Year	Date	No. of Days Open	No. Killed	Man-Days
1974-75	10/4, 5,6; 11,12,13; 18,19,20	9	2	1,476
1975-76	10/3, 4,5; 10,11,12; 17,18,19	9	5	1,341
1976-77	10/1, 2,3; 8,9,10; 15,16,17	9	2	1,449
1977-78	9/30, 10/1,2; 7,8,9; 14,15,16	9	5	1,674

General Season

Year	No. Days Open	No. Killed
1974-75	59	0
1975-76	59	2
1976-77	59	1
1977-78	59	3

Baker and Columbia Counties
(outside the Osceola W.M.A)

Year	Kills Checked	Estimated Kills
1977-78	6	17

Special Bear Hunt Permits
(Osceola and Apalachicola W.M.A.'s)

Year	No. Sold
1974-75	329
1975-76	298
1976-77	322
1977-78	377