



## Proposed Rule Amendments for Bear Hunting

Draft Rule

April 2015

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Division of Hunting and Game Management



This presentation covers the proposed draft rule amendments related to bear hunting. Full text of all proposed rule amendments (Rules 68A-1.004, 4.001, 4.004, 9.007, 12.002, 12.003, 12.004, 12.007, 13.0001, 13.004, and 24.002, FAC), including nonsubstantive technical changes and corrections, are included in the additional background material.



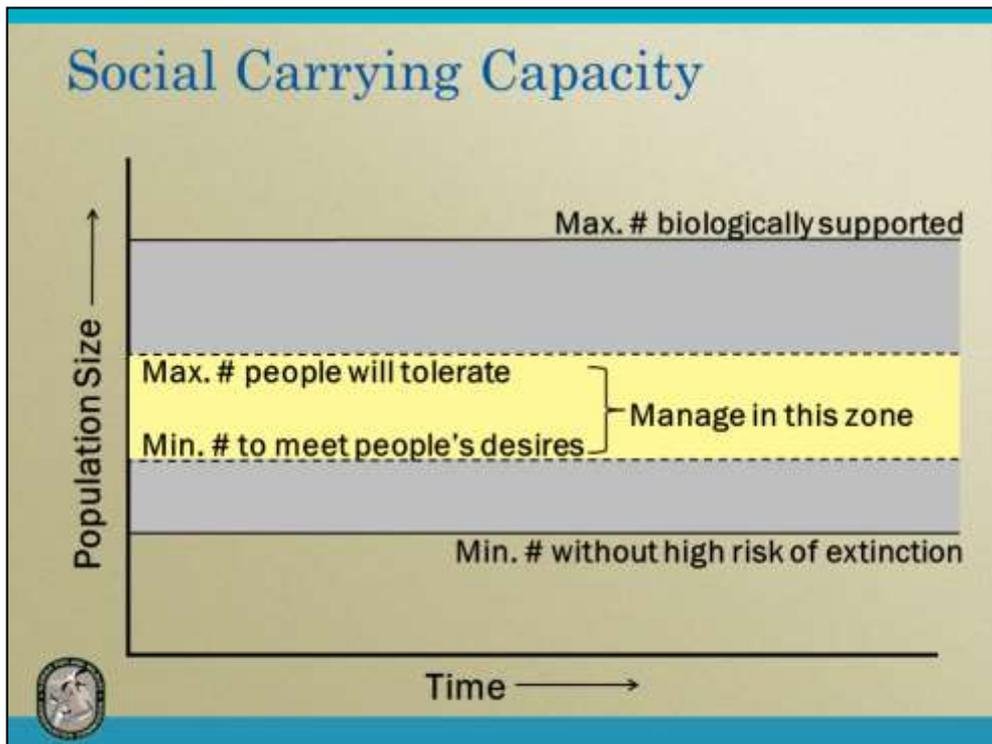
This is a depiction of the wildlife conflict policy area that Commissioners discussed previously, as it relates to black bears.

The first part of the curve is **Little or no management**. In the early centuries as Florida was settled bears numbered around 11,000 statewide and were over exploited and hunted indiscriminately, which led to the bear becoming rare and almost extirpated from Florida.

- Then came the **recovery management** phase. In 1974 the state listed the bear as threatened with populations estimated as low as 300 – 500 bears. Hunting was closed in all but 3 counties until 1994 when the season was closed state-wide. With protection and improved habitats, bear populations began to rebound and bears become more numerous. In 2002, the statewide population was estimated at 3,000 bears. The bear was removed from the state threatened list in 2012, when FWC's current bear management plan was approved.

- As bear numbers have grown over the past decade and human population has increased, we entered the next phase of management, which is **conflict management**. In recent years conflict has increased dramatically. Bear calls have increased 400% over the last decade. We are striving for sustainable coexistence, and look forward to working with you to see what next steps we might take.

- Where we are right now on this curve is subject to individual interpretation, but recent events suggest somewhere squarely in the conflict management zone.



A corollary to biological carrying capacity is social carrying capacity. This is the number of individuals of a species that humans want or can tolerate. Although it can be challenging to achieve, ideally social carrying capacity (yellow zone) lies within the biological carrying capacity of an area (grey zone). Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

## Hunting as a Tool to Manage Wildlife

- Unregulated hunting can put populations at risk
- History of game management and regulated hunting across North America
  - Population recovery
  - Abundance
  - Sustainability
- Hunting is a proven population control method
- Surveys consistently show high public support for regulated hunting



Americans Attitudes Toward Hunting, fishing and Target shooting 2011, National Shooting Sports Foundation.

Nationwide Scientific Survey Finds Continued Approval of Hunting, Fishing, and Shooting, Responsive Management Report, 2011.



Most states (32 of 41) that have resident black bear populations allow hunting and use harvest as a population management tool. The only states other than Florida in the United States that do not allow hunting have populations of less than 600 bears. Approved methods for hunting bears include still hunting, hunting with dogs, and hunting over feeding stations.

## Commission Direction

### Proposed hunting in 2015

- Simple
- Conservative
- Framework from February 2015



At the February 2015 Commission meeting, the Commission directed staff to propose draft rule amendments for a bear hunting season in 2015, which would be simple and conservative. At the same meeting, staff presented a conceptual hunting framework, and that framework was the basis for developing the proposed draft rule amendments presented herein. The conceptual framework was founded on the goal of ensuring that hunts would be consistent with biologically sustainable population objectives for each BMU. Staff recommended erring on the conservative side with harvest until we get experience and data.



This map shows bear range and the Bear Management Units (BMUs), as delineated in the Bear Management Plan, which was approved by the Commission in 2012. BMUs form the geographic basis of bear management, allowing management approaches tailored for specific areas and subpopulations of bears. Management goals are for sustainable populations within each BMU based on the biological characteristics of the subpopulation. Hunting opportunities also would be based on BMUs.

## Licenses and Permit Requirements

- Hunting license, unless exempt
- Bear permit
  - Nontransferable
  - \$100 resident
  - \$300 nonresident
  - No exemptions other than pre-1998 lifetime license holders
- FWC-managed areas:
  - Management Area Permit
  - Quota permit if required



Proposed license and permit requirements:

Hunting license (unless exempt per 379.353, F.S.)

Bear permit (under Special-Use Rule from Statutory Authority):

- Nontransferable
- \$100 resident, \$300 nonresident
- No exemptions from permit requirements; persons who purchased lifetime licenses before 1998 would be exempt from permit fee.

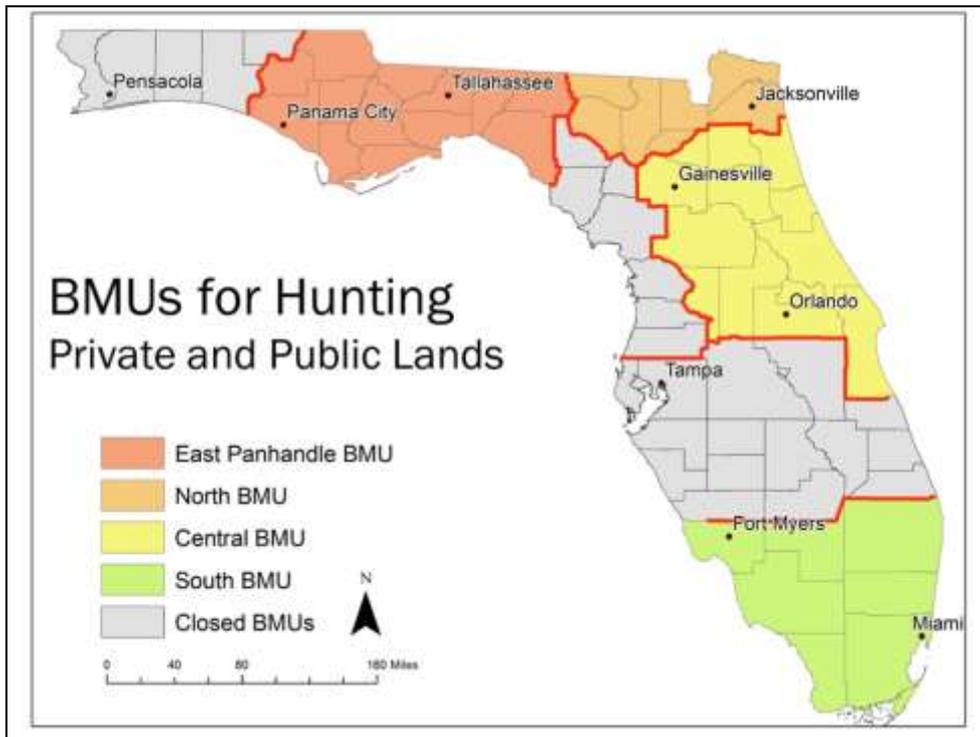
FWC-managed areas:

- Management Area Permit would be required if hunting on FWC-managed areas.
- Quota permit would be needed if required by area-specific rule.

## Bear Permit Issuance

- No limit to number of permits sold (anyone can hunt)
- Permit sales end midnight on day before season
- Issued through license vendor or online (RLIS)





Season would be open in all counties comprising 4 Bear Management Units (BMUs):

East Panhandle BMU – Bay, Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Taylor, Wakulla, and Washington counties.

North BMU – Baker, Columbia, Duval, Hamilton, Nassau, Suwannee, and Union counties.

Central BMU – Alachua, Bradford, Brevard, Clay, Flagler, Lake, Marion, Orange, Putnam, Seminole, St. Johns, Sumter, and Volusia counties.

South BMU – Broward, Collier, Hendry, Lee, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm Beach counties.

These BMUs are proposed for hunting because they have bear populations that are large enough to sustain hunting: more than 200 individuals according to the 2002 estimates. Bear hunting would be legal on all private and some public lands in these BMUs.

## Season Length and Timing

### One week (7 days)

- Saturday through Friday
- In 2015, October 24-30 (dates vary with calendar year)
- Subject to ending earlier in any given Bear Management Unit (BMU), if harvest objective is reached (2-day minimum)
  - Information provided to hunters daily online or by phone



The season timing would coincide with high bear activity and before denning begins. Cubs would be old enough to be independent. This timing was chosen to avoid overlap with deer-dog hunting or training seasons.

The season would open on the Saturday before the last Saturday in October and close 6 days thereafter on a Friday. If a BMU's harvest objective is attained prior to the season close and on or after the second day of the season, that BMU's season shall close at midnight on the day its harvest objective is attained. Therefore, the season would be at least 2 days long in any BMU.

The 2015 season dates would be 10/24 – 10/30.

## Methods

- Archery equipment, firearms, and ammunition as allowed for deer
- No feeding (bait)
  - Private land
    - Hunter and bear 100+ yards from game feeding station
    - No processed foods, other than commercial deer or hog feed, may be used at game feeding station
  - Public land – no feeding of game allowed
- No dogs



This slide summarizes the proposed rules for methods-of-take.

No feeding:

Hunter and bear must both be more than 100 yards from a game feeding station (see 68A-12.002(8) for rules concerning game feeding stations).

No processed foods may be used at game feeding stations in BMUs with an established season for taking black bears.

No feeding of any game is allowed currently on FWC-managed lands (e.g., Wildlife Management Areas).

No dogs allowed for hunting, but allow dogs on leashes for trailing shot bears.

Methods of take would include bows, crossbows, muzzleloading guns, rifles, pistols, revolvers, and shotguns, with restrictions on these the same as for deer hunting.

## Bag Limit and Other Rules

- Bag limit of one bear per person per season
- 100-lb minimum live-weight
- No harvest of bears with cub(s) present
- Daytime hunting only
- No sale of parts
- Wanton waste rule clarified
  - Harvested bears are commonly eaten
- Bears must be checked within 12 hours of harvest
  - May be field-dressed
  - Evidence of gender must be attached
  - Tagged and biological data collected at check station



Daytime hunting: one-half hour before sunrise until one-half hour after sunset.

Wanton waste rule would be clarified for all game (e.g., deer, turkeys, squirrels, quail): No one shall "...waste any game that has been wounded or killed by that person while hunting. For purposes of this paragraph, "waste" means to intentionally fail to make a reasonable effort to retrieve a wounded or killed animal and render it for consumption or use."

## Setting Harvest Objectives

Proposed draft rule language: “The harvest objective for each BMU shall be as established by order of the Executive Director, after approval of the Commission, and shall be based on the proportion of the BMU population available for harvest, consistent with biologically sustainable population objectives for each BMU.”



## Harvest Objectives for 2015: a Conservative Approach

Bear Management Unit	2002 Population Estimate	20% of Population Estimate	Known Mortality (Average)	Harvest Objective
East Panhandle	600	120	75	45
North	250*	50	9	40
Central	1,000*	200	141	60
South	700	140	10	130

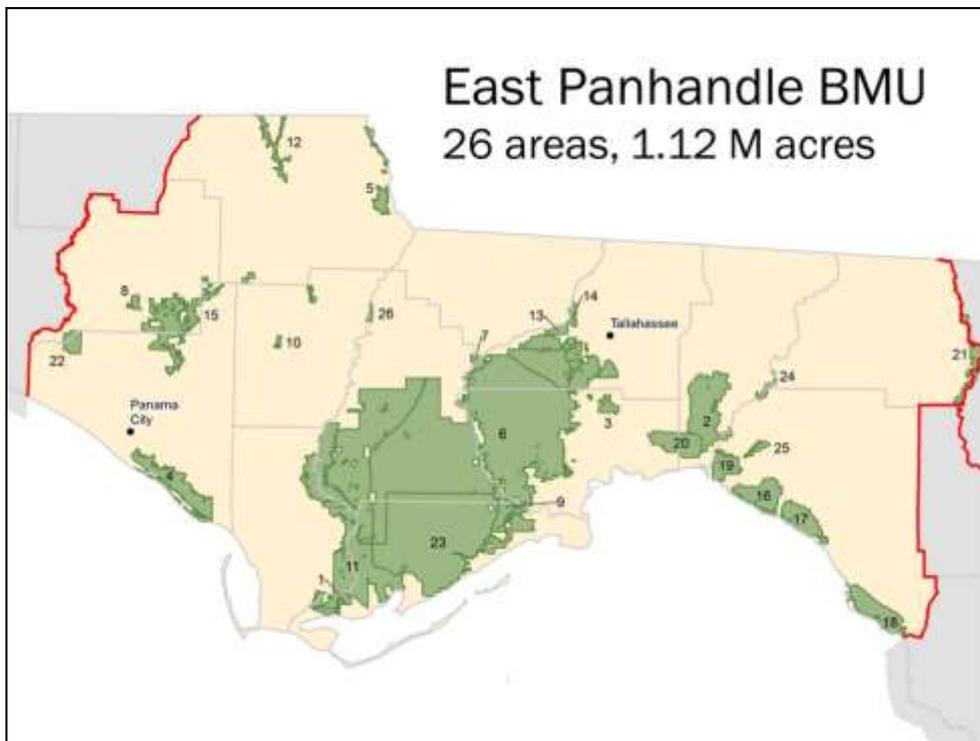


This slide shows the four Bear Management Units that are proposed to be open for bear hunting, and includes the process by which the FWC came up with the harvest objectives for each area. The population estimates are considered a conservative minimum number of bears in each unit, as these estimates were for the year 2002. Note that the estimates for the North and Central BMUs have asterisk, this is because we expect to have new estimates this summer that will be used instead of those from 2002. The FWC would like to stabilize population growth in these four units, and therefore wants to achieve 20% reduction in each population. The harvest objective takes 20% of the average from the 2002 population estimate and then subtract from that number the average annual mortality, which includes bears hit and killed by cars and bears that the FWC captured and killed for conflict behavior. Because of the cyclic nature of road kills, where numbers tend to vary from high to low from year to year based on food availability and other factors, we took the average roadkill from the last 3 years to estimate the number of roadkill for 2015. FWC euthanasia of bears for conflict behavior has increased recently, and therefore we will not be using the average from multiple years to estimate the number of bears we will have removed in 2015. Instead, we will use the number of bears euthanized from July 2014 to June 2015.

# Hunting on Public Lands

- 49 areas, 2 million acres
- Selection factors
  - Areas within bear range
  - Hunting opportunity within hunted BMUs
  - Existing hunting seasons (types and timing)
  - Landowner or partner-agency approval

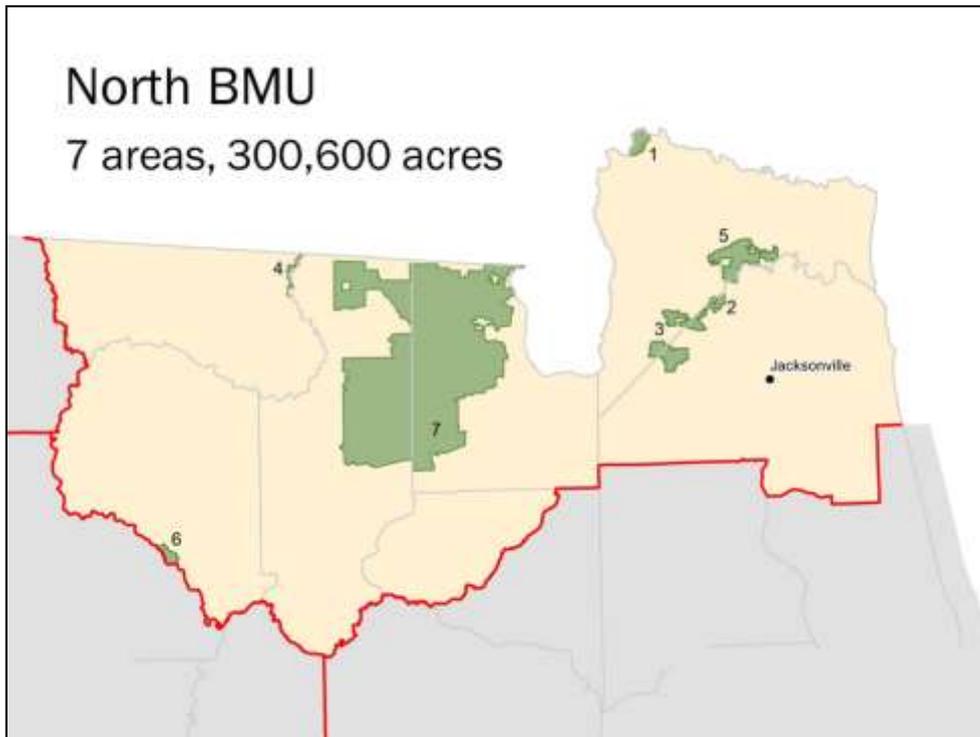




The numbers on the slide correspond to the following list of Wildlife Management Areas (WMA)/Wildlife and Environmental Areas (WEA):

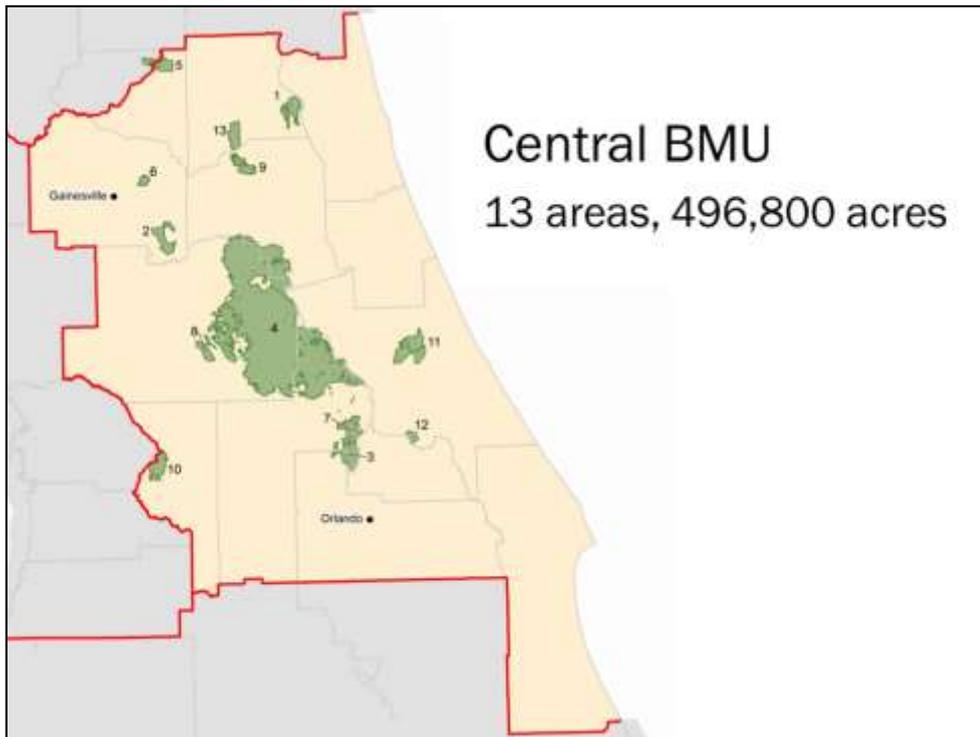
1. Box-R WMA
2. Aucilla WMA
3. Wakulla WMA
4. Tyndall Air Force Base
5. Apalachee WMA
6. Apalachicola WMA
7. Apalachicola - Bradwell Unit WMA
8. Fitzhugh Carter Tract Econfina Creek WMA
9. Tate's Hell - Womack Creek Unit WMA
10. Juniper Creek WMA
11. Apalachicola River WEA
12. Chipola River WMA
13. Talquin WMA
14. Ochlockonee River WMA
15. Econfina Creek WMA
16. Big Bend - Hickory Mound Unit WMA
17. Big Bend - Spring Creek Unit WMA
18. Big Bend - Tide Swamp Unit WMA
19. Big Bend - Snipe Island Unit WMA
20. Flint Rock WMA
21. Twin Rivers WMA
22. Pine Log WMA
23. Tate's Hell WMA
24. Middle Aucilla WMA
25. Lower Econfina WMA

## 26. Beaverdam Creek WMA



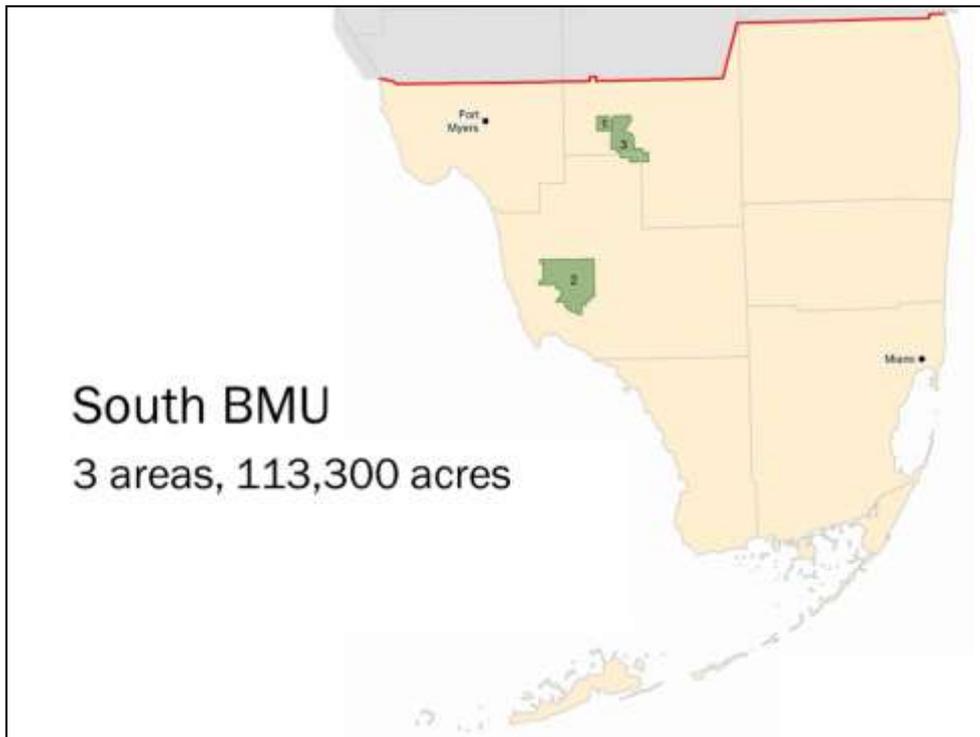
The numbers on the slide correspond to the following list of Wildlife Management Areas (WMA):

1. Ralph E. Simmons WMA
2. Thomas Creek WMA
3. Cary WMA
4. Cypress Creek WMA
5. Four Creeks WMA
6. Little River WMA
7. Osceola WMA



The numbers on the slide correspond to the following list of Wildlife Management Areas (WMA):

1. Bayard WMA
2. Lochloosa WMA
3. Rock Springs Run WMA
4. Ocala WMA
5. Raiford WMA
6. Hatchet Creek WMA
7. Seminole Forest WMA
8. Marshall Swamp WMA
9. Etoniah Creek WMA
10. Jumper Creek WMA
11. Tiger Bay WMA
12. Lake Monroe WMA
13. Belmore WMA



The numbers on the slide correspond to the following list of Wildlife Management Areas (WMA):

1. Spirit-of-the-Wild WMA
2. Picayune Strand WMA
3. Okaloacoochee Slough WMA

## Engaging the Public

- BMU stakeholder meetings (7)
- Webinars (3)
- Public comments on website
- Comments received through other channels

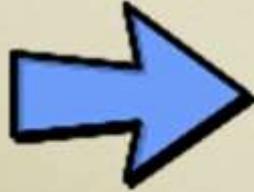


# Public Input Overview

- Themes in support of hunting:
  - Bear population sufficient to support hunting
  - Will reduce conflict
  - Needed to control population size
  - Restore tradition, allow youth to experience
- Themes in opposition to hunting:
  - Bear populations negatively affected by humans (habitat loss, too many people, people providing food)
  - Bear population size not sufficient
  - Hunting won't address conflicts
- General:
  - Wait for updated population estimates
  - Many comments on methods and types of hunting



## Staff Recommendation



- Approve proposals for rule amendments for advertising and final adoption at June 2015 Commission meeting
- Provide direction or guidance for staff as we continue working with the public



The staff recommendation is for the Commission to approve the proposed amendments to Rules 68A-1.004, 4.001, 4.004, 9.007, 12.002, 12.003, 12.004, 12.007, 13.0001, 13.004, and 24.002, FAC, for advertising in the Florida Administrative Register, and to consider final adoption at the June 2015 Commission meeting. Staff requests the Commission to provide any direction or guidance as we continue working with the public.

## Backup Material

The following slides are considered backup material and are not anticipated to be part of the actual presentation to the Commission.



## Florida Black Bear Hunting History



- 1936 - First regulated harvest
- 1950 - Bears classified as a game species
- 1994 - Bear hunting closed statewide
- 1981 to 1994:
  - Average harvest = 46 bears/year
  - Harvest range = 22 to 68 bears/year



Bears in Florida were hunted until 1994 when the season was closed to help reduce mortality factors on bears. Prior to 1936, there were no hunting protections for bears. Since then, progressively more restrictive regulations on hunting were put into place to manage the populations appropriately. In 1974 the state listed the bear as threatened with populations estimated as low as 300 - 500 bears. Hunting was closed in all but 3 counties until 1994 when the season was closed state-wide.