

# Bear Hunting: One Part of Comprehensive Management



Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission - June, 2016

## Conflict Management -- Role of Hunting

- **Local scale:** securing attractants, BearWise communities, removing individual bears, enforcing feeding rule
- **BMU scale:** hunting
  - Keeps population size in check
  - Reduces numbers pushed onto roads and into neighborhoods
  - Increases bears' wariness of humans



Regulated hunting is widely accepted as an important part in comprehensive efforts to manage human-bear conflict. As the size of a healthy and abundant bear population is controlled by hunting to be in balance with available habitats, bears are not as crowded, more cubs survive and fewer bears are forced out of natural habitat onto roads and into neighborhoods. In addition, bear experts agree that hunting also can help make bears more wary of people, which reduces conflicts and human safety risks.



Bear hunting is a conservation practice in most states and every Canadian province. This map shows the states and Canadian provinces where black bear hunting occurs. Nine states do not have established black bears populations (North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, Illinois, Rhode Island, Texas, and Ohio). Most states (33 of 41) that have resident black bear populations allow hunting and use it as a population management tool. In every state and province with more than about 700 bears, the agency recognizes the important role hunting plays in a comprehensive approach to bear conservation, which balances the needs of bears and people. The benefits include contributing to conflict management while providing citizens a legitimate and traditional use of a renewable resource, building strong support for maintaining robust and healthy bear populations.



## Engaging the Public in 2016

- Public comments at Commission meetings
- Meetings with organizations
- 6 BMU stakeholder meetings
- Meetings with statewide Technical Assistance Group
- 3 public webinars
- Comments received through other channels



## Summary of Public Input

- Stop, postpone, or continue hunting
- Change hunting format, details
- Do more research, analyses
- Focus on other parts of comprehensive bear management
  - Securing attractants, BearWise communities
  - Habitat availability and management practices
- Increased enforcement



# Summary of Public Input

## Hunt Changes

- Limit hunters
- Shorten hunt period
- Require tagging in the field
- Enhance protection of cubs
- Allow dogs
- Address game feeding stations
- Create sanctuaries (no-hunt areas)
- Increase permit cost



## Four Options

1. 2016 hunt, same as 2015
  - a. Identical framework as in 2015
  - b. Updated harvest objectives
2. **Staff recommendation:** more precise hunt
  - a. Use input from public and stakeholders and data from 2015
  - b. Additional safeguards and restrictions
3. Postpone bear hunt until 2017
  - a. Continue other work on comprehensive management
4. No bear hunting



1. This option would prescribe a bear hunt in 2016 with identical framework to the hunt held in 2015, but with updated harvest objectives.
2. Staff recommendation: This limited hunt option would allow FWC to hold a more precise bear hunt in 2016 utilizing the data and information collected including the latest bear population science. This option also puts more restrictions on hunters who choose to participate.
3. This option would postpone any bear hunt in 2016, but the Commission would consider a 2017 bear hunt at a later date. Not holding a 2016 bear hunt will give FWC more time to work with stakeholders, local communities and the public to better develop the important role hunting plays in Florida's comprehensive bear management program.
4. Option 4 would be for the Commission to repeal bear hunt rules and not allow bear hunting in Florida going forward.

# Bear Hunting

## Safe and Sustainable

- FWC understands and appreciates concerns expressed about
  - Sustainability?
  - Sufficient scientific information?
  - Necessary?
- Hunting is an important tool in comprehensive bear management
- Committed to an adaptive approach
  - Clear objectives
  - Continued research, monitoring, evaluation
  - Management revisions as needed

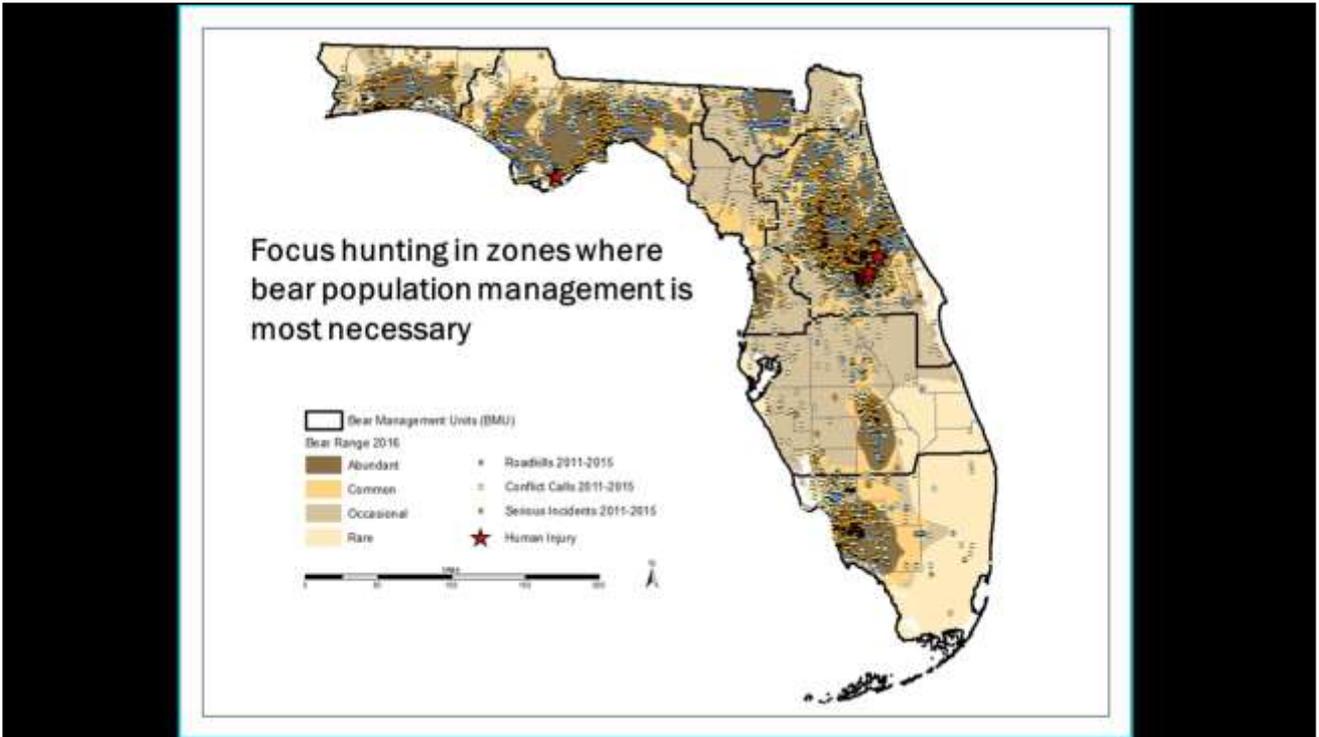


## Option 2 - 2016 Hunt

### More Precision, Accountability

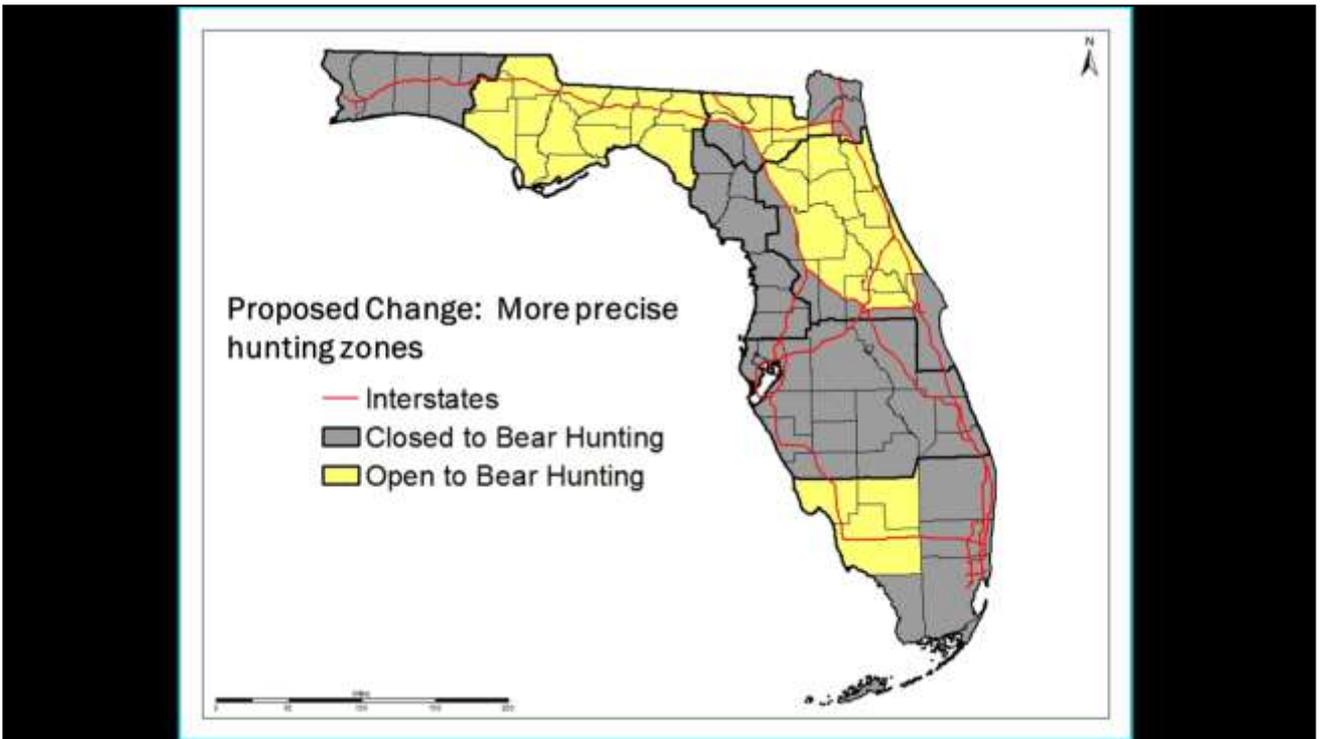
- Goals
  - Adjust hunt format based on current information and 2015 experience
  - Address input from public
- Approach
  - Limit the number of hunters
  - Reduce area open to hunting
  - Make permits unit- and time-specific





This slide shows how human-bear conflict is concentrated in areas where bears are abundant. The “serious incidents” category includes these occurrences:

- in building
- threatened animal
- attacked animal
- killed animal
- animal threatened bear
- animal attacked bear
- animal killed bear
- human threatened bear
- threatened human



The 2015 bear hunt was open in the entire area encompassed by 4 BMUs. The proposed change for 2016 is to reduce the area open to hunting so that hunting is more precisely targeting areas where bear population management is most necessary including where bears are most abundant, the areas where conflict calls and roadkills are most common and where the major incidents have occurred. This also reduces mortality in areas where bears may be moving from abundant populations to smaller populations, further encouraging connections. This reduction would result in 32 counties in Florida with no bear hunting.

# Proposed Changes

## Limit Permits

- Limit number of permits issued
  - Based on revised harvest objectives and rates of harvest by hunters in 2015
- Permits restricted to hunting zone within one BMU
- Permits restricted to one hunting periods
- Permits issued first-come, first-served
- Require hunting license



# Proposed Changes

## Manage Harvest Timing

- Divide limited hunters among 3 harvest periods; 4 days in each period
- One third of total limited hunters per period

2016 dates:

- Period 1: Oct 21-24 (Fri - Mon)
- Period 2: Oct 26-29 (Wed - Sat)
- Period 3: Oct 31-Nov 3 (Mon - Thurs)



## Proposed Changes

- Issue tags and require hunter to tag bear immediately to enhance enforcement
- Further constrain hunting near game feeding stations
- Prohibit taking any bear if other bears, including cubs, are present
- Update hunting opportunities on public lands
- Establish harvest objectives and number of permits by Executive Order



# Hearing Public Input

## Even More Conservative and Accountable Hunt

- More refined hunting zones
- Limit total number of hunters
- Limit number of hunters in each hunt zone
- Divide hunting pressure over 3 hunt periods



As a result of the public input and suggestions, the staff proposal is for a revised hunting format that is more precise and accountable.

# Hearing Public Input

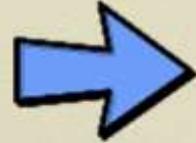
## Even More Conservative and Accountable Hunt

- Require hunters to immediately tag bear
- Prohibit taking any bear if other bears, including cubs, are present
- Further restrict taking bears near game feeding stations



As a result of the public input and suggestions, the staff proposal is for a revised hunting format that is more precise and accountable.

## Staff Recommendation



- Approve Option 2, the staff recommendation for a more conservative bear hunt, including proposals for rule amendments for advertising and final adoption at September 2016 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, 68A-4.001, 68A-9.007, 68A-12.002, 68A-12.004, 68A-13.004, 68A-15.004, 68A-15.062, 68A-15.063, 68A-15.064, 68A-15.065, 68A-17.004, 68A-17.005, F.A.C., for advertising in the Florida Administrative Register, and to consider final adoption at the September 2016 Commission meeting. Staff requests the Commission to provide any direction or guidance as we continue working with the public.