



Final Population Modeling Confirms that Florida has a Robust and Growing Bear Population

News Release

Thursday, September 15, 2016

FWC and Dr. Joseph Clark, a Leading Black Bear Scientist, Update Florida's Bear Population Estimates

One of the nation's leading bear scientists, Dr. Joseph D. Clark of the U.S. Geological Survey and the University of Tennessee, has released the final modeling results estimating Florida's black bear population. Data collected by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) staff and partners in 2014 and 2015 and analyzed by Dr. Clark's team have confirmed that Florida's bear population is robust and widespread. The final estimates indicate that Florida's statewide bear population now stands at 4,030, up from a few hundred bears in the 1970s. This final estimate represents a refinement of the preliminary March 2016 estimate of 4,350 bears and is based on high-resolution modelling that incorporated specific habitat features in each bear management unit studied.

This final population estimate indicates a bear population 48 percent larger than previous estimates done in the early 2000s. In addition, the current bear range is 45 percent larger than the range map from the early 2000s. This population growth and range expansion reflects how conservation measures have propelled the growth of Florida bear populations from the 1970s level of 300 to 500 bears to their abundant status today. To learn more about the FWC bear population study and view [Dr. Clark's final report](#).

Nick Wiley, FWC Executive Director, said, "Dr. Clark's final population model affirms the cutting-edge, scientific work that is being done to accurately estimate Florida's growing bear population. We would like to thank the many FWC staff and partners, especially Dr. Clark, for their quality work on this project. While we recognize that the initial March estimate was higher than the population figures Dr. Clark's final modeling offers, our decision making has been and will continue to be guided by sound science. FWC's focus remains responsibly balancing the needs of black bears with the safety and well-being of Florida's families and communities."

Dr. Joseph Clark, Branch Chief of the U.S. Geological Survey's Southern Appalachian Field Branch, said, "Based on these updated final population estimates, we can unequivocally state that Florida's black bear population is large and has greatly increased since the 1970s. Though differences in methodology between our estimates and the early 2000 estimates prevent direct comparisons, our data suggest that Florida's bear population has increased and is doing well. Our partnership with FWC on this project represents a state-of-the-art scientific approach to estimating bear populations that is already influencing similar work in other parts of the country."

Modeling to estimate wildlife populations is not unique to bears. Similar techniques are used to estimate various animal populations such as turkeys, alligators and shorebirds. The final population estimate is one example of the conservation work that FWC is undertaking to better understand and manage Florida's growing bear population. The final population estimates on five of the largest bear subpopulations in the state total about

3,900. Including 140 bears estimated to be in the Chassohowitzka and Glades-Highlands population, the statewide final population estimate stands at 4,030 bears. This final estimate does not include some bears that may reside in areas not sampled by the study. These estimates were based on advanced scientific methodology that genetically analyzed thousands of hair samples to produce a population estimate across 9.6 million acres of bear habitat. State-of-the-art modelling techniques incorporated demographics, movement patterns, and detailed habitat characteristics to produce the final population estimates.

This summer, FWC invited counties and other local governments to submit proposals so the agency can effectively distribute state funding for reducing bear conflicts in Florida communities. The \$825,000 in funding will be dedicated to programs that are committed to taking a BearWise approach and can demonstrate a measurable reduction in human-bear interactions. Gov. Rick Scott and the Florida Legislature invested \$500,000 in this fund and the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida added \$325,000 from proceeds of the "Conserve Wildlife" license plate. Sixty percent of the \$500,000 from the Legislature must go to local governments which have passed ordinances to reduce human-bear conflicts. Local governments have until October 14, 2016 to submit their proposals.

Floridians can help deter bears from entering their neighborhood and potentially causing conflict by removing attractants such as garbage, pet food, birdseed and keeping grills clean. If a bear associates places where people live and work as an easy place to find a meal, they will return to that source and eventually lose their fear of people. It is illegal in Florida to leave out food or garbage that will attract bears and cause human-bear conflicts. Feeding bears creates a safety risk for people as well as for bears. Call the FWC's Wildlife Alert Hotline at 1-888-404-FWCC (3922) if you see or suspect that someone is feeding or attracting bears or if you are experiencing conflict with a bear.

Dr. Joseph D. Clark is Branch Chief of the U.S. Geological Survey's Southern Appalachian Field Branch (SAFB), located at the University of Tennessee. Dr. Clark holds an Adjunct Professor appointment in the Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries. SAFB conducts hypothesis-driven environmental research focusing on carnivore ecology, population dynamics and habitat modeling.

Dr. Clark served for nine years as a Research Biologist (bear and furbearers) and then as Assistant Chief with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. He has been Branch Chief of SAFB for 23 years. Dr. Clark has studied population dynamics of black bears in the Interior Highlands of Arkansas, at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge in Georgia, in the Mobile Basin of Alabama, White River National Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and throughout Louisiana; has evaluated the effects of public use (i.e., deer hunting) on Florida panther ecology and management in south Florida; has developed methods for black bear reintroduction in Tennessee, Kentucky, Louisiana and Arkansas; has performed a demographic analysis of a reintroduced elk herd at Great Smoky Mountains National Park, North Carolina; has studied muskrat and river otter ecology at Mammoth Cave National Park, Kentucky; and has performed a population viability analysis for the threatened Louisiana black bear. Dr. Clark has authored more than 90 scientific articles.