



## **FWC awards \$825,000 to local governments to reduce human-bear conflicts**

### **News Release**

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### **Twelve counties to receive funding aimed to curb human-bear conflicts**

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) today announced which local governments will be awarded a share of the \$825,000 in bear-conflict reduction funding. This funding aims to reduce the number of bears spending time in neighborhoods by participating in cost sharing with local governments to provide more residents with bear-resistant equipment. Unsecured trash is the No. 1 reason that bears enter neighborhoods and come into conflict with people. The funding proposals were scored by FWC staff, including bear biologists, and were awarded based on several criteria including the likelihood the project would reduce human-bear interactions.

FWC Chairman Brian Yablonski said, "The recent scientific work to accurately estimate Florida's adult bear population has confirmed that the recovery of the Florida black bear is a true conservation success story. A large bear population in Florida means that the FWC must continue our mission to balance the needs of our bears and Florida residents. Today's funding announcement is innovative conservation work in action and serves as an important step forward for Florida communities that are working to address this serious problem. By continuing to strengthen our partnerships with local governments and neighborhoods, we are helping give Floridians the tools needed to reduce interactions with bears."

During the 2016 Legislative Session, the Legislature and Gov. Rick Scott provided \$500,000 to cost-share with local governments in areas with high levels of human-bear conflicts. The majority of this funding, roughly \$375,000, came from permit sales for the 2015 bear hunt, and an additional \$125,000 came from the State Game Trust Fund. At least 60 percent of the State-appropriated funding is required to go to local governments who implemented ordinances requiring trash be kept secure from bears. Seminole, Lake, Santa Rosa, and Orange counties passed trash ordinances and therefore were eligible to receive additional funding. The FWC also requested funding from the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida using proceeds of the Conserve Wildlife Tag license plate. An additional \$325,000 in CWT funds were awarded, resulting in a total of \$825,000 available in funding. The FWC has also requested additional funding as part of the agency's legislative budget request for next fiscal year.

Earlier this year, FWC researchers partnered with Dr. Joseph Clark, a nationally recognized black bear scientist, to perform scientific modeling to estimate Florida's bear population. This groundbreaking study determined that Florida's black bear population is widespread and robust with over 4,000 adult bears in the state. Even though Florida

black bears are not normally aggressive, more bears in Florida means there is a higher likelihood for human-bear interactions which can be dangerous. The FWC works to balance the needs of this large population with the safety of Floridians.

FWC Executive Director Nick Wiley said, "We are grateful to see such a significant level of funding now flowing to support and incentivize community-based solutions that will surely reduce conflicts between people and bears. This has truly been a team effort with strong support from our Governor, Legislature, the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida and the leaders and residents in our local communities who are stepping up to help. As we take this important step forward, we need to be mindful that efforts to implement our comprehensive bear management plan will need to continue in earnest as our bear populations continue to grow and thrive across Florida."

The "BearWise" funding opportunity was announced on July 11 and applications were due Oct. 14. A panel of FWC staff evaluated each application based on several factors, including:

- Does the municipality have an ordinance in place that requires residents and businesses to keep trash and other attractants secure from bears?
- How many households within the municipality are in an area with significant human-bear conflicts?
- How much funding will the municipality match for the project (funds or in-kind or a combination of both)?
- What is the likelihood the project will result in a community-wide reduction of human-bear conflicts?
- How many residences and businesses are expected to benefit from the project?

#### **The cost-share bear conflict reduction funding awards:**

**Collier County- \$17,499**– County Parks and Recreation will receive \$4,899 to buy bear-resistant trash cans for three parks and preserves, and Farm Worker Village Neighborhood Association will receive \$12,600 to modify 591 regular trash cans to make them bear-resistant.

**Franklin County - \$3,400** – The county will receive \$2,400 and the City of Carrabelle will receive \$1,000 to modify regular trash cans to make them bear-resistant for residents in the southern portion of the county.

**Gulf County - \$25,422** – The county will receive \$25,422 to modify regular trash cans to make them bear-resistant for residents in the southern portion of the county.

**Lake County - \$150,000** – The county will receive \$150,000 to provide bear-resistant trash cans to residents at a discounted cost. The county has an ordinance that requires trash be kept secure.

**Leon County - \$30,000** – The county will receive \$30,000 to modify regular trash cans to make them bear-resistant for residents and reinforced dumpster lids for businesses in the western portion of the county.

**Marion County - \$22,000** – The county will receive \$22,000 to provide bear-resistant trash cans to residents at a discounted cost in areas experiencing human-bear conflicts.

**Orange County - \$150,000** – The county will receive \$150,000 to provide bear-resistant trash cans to residents at a discounted cost in the northwestern portion of the county, which has an ordinance that requires trash be kept secure.

**Putnam County - \$18,000** – The county will receive \$18,000 to provide bear-resistant trash cans to residents at a discounted cost in areas experiencing human-bear conflicts.

**Santa Rosa County - \$150,000** – The county will receive \$150,000 to provide bear-resistant trash cans to residents at a discounted cost in the southern portion of the county, which has an ordinance that requires trash be kept secure.

**Seminole County - \$159,000** – The county will receive \$150,000 to provide bear-resistant trash cans to residents at a discounted cost in the western portion of the county, which has an ordinance that requires trash be kept secure. Springs Landing Homeowner’s Association, which is in the western portion of the county, will be awarded \$9,000 to provide bear-resistant trash cans to residents at a discounted cost.

**Volusia County - \$80,000** – The county will receive \$40,000 to provide bear-resistant trash cans to residents at a discounted cost, and the cities of Daytona and DeBary will receive \$20,000 each to provide the same for their residents.

**Wakulla County - \$19,679** – The county will receive \$19,679 to provide bear-resistant trash cans to residents at a discounted cost.