



## FWC continues cutting-edge science to collect data on Florida's widespread bear population

### News Release

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To continue the cutting-edge science being conducted on Florida's black bears, FWC researchers recently placed radio-collars on 16 adult female bears to track their movements in and around Tate's Hell State Forest in northwest Florida. Data collected from this study will allow FWC researchers to better understand bear population dynamics in this area, which will further guide the agency's comprehensive bear management program. This month, FWC bear researchers and one of the nation's leading bear scientists, Dr. Joseph D. Clark of the U.S. Geological Survey and the University of Tennessee, released the final modeling results estimating Florida's black bear population at 4,030, up from a few hundred bears in the 1970s.

FWC Executive Director Nick Wiley said, "The latest science has confirmed that Florida's black bear population is robust and widespread. Now FWC bear researchers are collecting data on this important bear population in northwest Florida. These data will guide our science-based decision making process as we work to best balance the safety and well-being of Florida's communities with growing black bear populations across our state."

The GPS collars on the female bears periodically record their locations using satellite telemetry and transmit those locations to researchers. These specially-tailored collars are designed to drop off in a certain amount of time and do not affect normal bear behavior. The collars can also send an alert if the bear stops moving for an extended period of time, indicating the bear may have denned for the winter or died.

Researchers will visit winter dens to see how many cubs are present, and then will put small, specially-made collars on the cubs to see how many of them survive their first year. Over the next three years this study will provide the FWC with more population information, including adult female survival rate, the age they first reproduce, the time between litters of cubs, the average number of cubs per litter, and cub survival rate. All of this information can be used to model population dynamics, including annual population growth rate.

Researchers have already noticed the collared bears are starting to become more active. FWC's bear experts have observed this throughout the state. During the fall, bear appetites increase as they begin a natural process of putting on fat for the winter. To be prepared for winter, bears require around 20,000 calories a day and will actively seek out and consume any convenient food source. This draws more bears into areas where people live and work, which can be potentially dangerous. FWC urges Floridians to be more aware of what they can do to help prevent human-bear conflicts. The agency is currently accepting proposals from local governments to receive a portion of \$825,000 in bear-conflict-reduction funding. Proposals are due by October 14, 2016. For more information on bear management in Florida, go to the BearWise page at [MyFWC.com/BearWise](http://MyFWC.com/BearWise) or the general bear page [MyFWC.com/bear](http://MyFWC.com/bear).