



FWC to Consider Staff Recommendation for Florida Bear Hunt, Four Options on How to Move Forward

News Release

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After receiving extensive input from the general public and stakeholders, FWC staff today released four options that Commissioners will consider on how to best move forward with controlling Florida's growing bear population, which is estimated to have swelled across Florida over the last ten years. The four options range from holding a bear hunt with the identical framework as last year to no bear hunting in Florida at all. The staff recommendation is for a more conservative and accountable hunt beginning in 2016. To help increase public participation in the decision making process, the FWC also announced that Floridians can visit MyFWC.com/Bear to learn more about each option and provide input and feedback on each specific proposal.

"The biologists and staff at FWC value all of the input we've received throughout the development of our comprehensive bear management program and we hope more Floridians will continue to provide input on the best way to manage Florida's growing bear population. We look forward to continuing to have a transparent, accountable process where everyone has their voices heard on this critical topic," said FWC Executive Director Nick Wiley. "We look forward to presenting this information to the Commission at our June meeting, and we invite all those interested to provide feedback on options that we've prepared for the Commission's consideration. Our focus will continue to be how to balance what's best for Florida's growing bear population with the safety of Florida families and our visitors."

Option 1 – 2016 Bear Hunt with Identical Framework as 2015

This option would prescribe a bear hunt in 2016 with identical framework to the hunt held in 2015, but with updated hunt objectives.

Option 2 – More Conservative Bear Hunt Utilizing Input Received from the Public and Stakeholders (FWC biologists recommend)

Over the course of the last year and a half, FWC has used various tools and methods to answer questions and receive input from the public on the FWC comprehensive bear management program. This includes three webinars, the involvement of regional bear stakeholder groups, input received at Commission meetings, and the thousands of comments received via emails, phone calls and letters.

This limited hunt option would allow FWC to hold an even more conservative 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. New restrictions would include: reducing the area open to hunting to correspond with areas of the state where human-bear conflicts are most prevalent; the prohibition of taking a bear with any other bear present, including cubs; further restrictions on

hunting near game feeding stations; limiting the number of permits; increased enforcement measures requiring hunters to tag bears immediately; and limiting the number of hunters in each area of the state, or Bear Management Unit.

Option 3 – Postpone Bear Hunting in Florida

Option 3 would be to postpone any bear hunt by creating a zero hunt objective, but the Commission could 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. FWC would also continue to work with local communities and the public to advance innovative ways to reduce human-bear conflicts with the understanding that a bear hunt in 2017 could be considered as an important conservation activity to control Florida's growing bear population. This would allow time for staff and commissioners to address conflict bear population data to ensure any future hunts are focused where needed.

This year, FWC will completely implement, monitor and measure the \$825,000 investment for local communities to reduce human-bear conflict. Florida is a national leader for investing on the reduction of human-bear conflicts in communities, and FWC will continue to work with local governments to keep families safe. The Commission would direct FWC officials to continue to use professional discretion to take an aggressive approach to remove additional bears in response to conflicts and critical public safety concerns.

Option 4 – No Bear hunting in Florida

Option 4 would be for the Commission to repeal bear hunt rules and not allow bear hunting in Florida in future years.

The Commission will consider all of these options, as well as the staff recommendation in its entirety for a more conservative bear hunt on June 22nd at their meeting in Eastpoint, FL. The public can provide input on all of the options at [FWC's Bear website](#). The FWC welcomes public input at all of our Commission meetings. To accommodate as much input as possible from those attending the upcoming Commission meeting in Eastpoint, the Chairman reserves the right to designate the amount of time given to each speaker, including time donation to other speakers. The meeting will also be streamed live on the Florida Channel.