

Florida Bear Management and Research Meeting Conclusion Statement

Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park

February 25-26, 2016

We, a group of bear managers and researchers from across the United States, were invited by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to critically review current bear management strategies and research efforts in Florida, and to offer recommendations for the future. We conclude that FWC is employing quality long-term data and scientific research to manage Florida's black bears.

The FWC implemented a responsible, science-based bear hunting plan in 2015. After reviewing the research-based population data and harvest data from the 2015 bear hunt, we recommend that Florida conduct a similar bear hunt in 2016 (with some procedural modifications); future hunts should be guided by adaptive management principles. We also recommend that FWC conduct additional population research specific to bear management units and tailor future management actions accordingly.

Regulated hunting is an effective tool that is widely used to manage, conserve, and sustain black bear populations, which is supported by the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. We unanimously concur that hunting is an appropriate response to address human-bear conflicts in Florida, in addition to the conflict-specific mitigation and prevention measures currently implemented by FWC.

Signatories:

Dr. Gary Alt is a private wildlife management consultant. Dr. Alt led the Bear Management Program for the Pennsylvania Game Commission for 22 years, and then supervised the Commission's Deer Management Section for 6 years until retirement in 2004.

Dr. David Garshelis is the Bear Project Leader for the Minnesota Division of Fish and Wildlife. Dr. Garshelis has worked for the Division for over 30 years, and also serves as an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota where he and his students conduct research on a variety of bear species around the world.

Dr. Craig McLaughlin is the Terrestrial Section Manager for Colorado Parks and Wildlife. He has held this position for 5 years. Dr. McLaughlin was the Bear Program Leader for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife for 18 years. He has also worked for Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, where his responsibilities included oversight of statewide bear management programs.

Colleen Olfenbittel is the Black Bear and Furbearer Biologist for the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. Ms. Olfenbittel has worked for the Commission for 9 years and has over 16 years of experience researching and managing black bears in the eastern U.S. Ms. Olfenbittel earned her Master's of Science degree in Wildlife Science from Virginia Tech.

Dr. Michael Pelton is Emeritus Professor of Wildlife Science in the Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries, University of Tennessee. Dr. Pelton worked for the University of Tennessee for over 30 years conducting black bear research across the southeastern U.S. Dr. Pelton has authored over 100 scientific articles, 10 book chapters and co-authored 1 book. He also was one of the founders and has been president of the International Association for Bear Research and Management, a group dedicated to professional management and conservation of bears of the world.

Harry Spiker is the Game Mammal Section Leader and the Black Bear Project Leader for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. He has been the Black Bear Project Leader for the Division for 15 years and has over 21 years of experience researching and managing black bears in the eastern United States. Mr. Spiker earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Wildlife & Fisheries Science from the Pennsylvania State University.

Jennifer Vashon is the Lead Lynx and Bear Biologist for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. She has worked for the Department for 16 years and has over 20 years of experience researching and managing black bears in the eastern United States. Ms. Vashon earned her Master's of Science degree in Wildlife Science from Virginia Tech.