

Florida Residents' Opinions on Black Bears and Black Bear Management

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
April 2017

Introduction and Methodology

This study was conducted for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (hereinafter referred to as the FWC) to determine Florida residents' attitudes towards black bears, their opinions on the management of black bears, their willingness to take actions to avoid conflicts with bears, and whether they have had any interactions with black bears. Additionally, the survey explored Florida residents' attitudes toward hunting in general and the hunting of black bears in particular. The study entailed a scientific telephone survey of adult Florida residents. The survey questionnaire was developed cooperatively by Responsive Management and the FWC. The sample of Florida residents was obtained so that it accurately represented adult Florida residents as a whole with regards to age, sex, education level, and household income. The survey was conducted in November 2016 and resulted in a total of 1,289 completed interviews. At least 175 surveys were completed in each of the seven Bear Management Units, which are centered on the black bear subpopulations in Florida. The sampling error is at most plus or minus 2.73 percentage points.

Knowledge of Black Bears

- A large majority (80%) of Florida residents correctly indicated that black bears currently live in Florida.
- Over half (58%) of Florida residents did not know that the black bear population in Florida has increased over the past 10 years, while 42% knew it had increased.

Opinion on the Management of the Black Bear Population in Florida

- Just over half (54%) of Florida residents thought the bear population in the state is at the right level, while 19% thought it is too high.
- A majority (64%) of Florida residents indicated that FWC staff are doing either a good or excellent job at managing the black bear population, while 17% rated them fair to poor.

Opinion on the Presence of Black Bears and Experiences With Black Bears

- When asked about their comfort level regarding the presence of black bears, just over half (56%) of Florida residents wanted to see and have black bears in their county but not in their neighborhood.
- Just over half (53%) of Florida residents agreed that black bears and humans can live in the same area without conflict, while 36% disagreed.
- Just under a third (31%) of Florida residents said that they have seen a black bear in the wild in Florida.

- Of those that had seen a bear, the majority (63%) of Florida residents described it as a positive experience, while 8% described it as a negative experience.

Problems With Black Bears

- Over half (55%) of Florida residents said that black bears are a problem in the state, however, only 10% of Florida residents said that black bears are a problem in their neighborhood.
- Only 3% of Florida residents had problems with black bears in the past 2 years. The most common problem was about bears getting into garbage (60%) and damaging property (54%).
- A large majority (80%) of Florida residents who had problems with black bears did not contact someone outside of friends or family for assistance with the problem.

Willingness to Take Actions to Address Negative Human-Bear Interactions

- The survey asked Florida residents about their willingness to take 9 actions recommended by FWC to reduce conflicts with bears:
 - Almost all (94%) of Florida residents were willing to keep trashcans in a secure location until the morning of pick up.
 - A large majority of Florida residents were willing to remove outdoor pet food (87%), clean and securely store outdoor grills (86%), or modify their existing trashcan to make it bear-resistant (82%).
- The survey asked Florida residents about their opinions on feeding bears and their support for regulations and penalties related to feeding bears:
 - A large majority (83%) of Florida residents disagreed that it is alright to feed wildlife.
 - A large majority (84%) of Florida residents supported the use of penalties, such as fines, for people who feed bears.
 - A large majority (87%) supported requiring people to secure trash from bears through the use of laws and ordinances.

Opinions on Black Bear Habitat in Florida

- Almost all (94%) of Florida residents agreed that keeping habitat for black bears is important.
- Just over half (53%) of Florida residents agreed there is enough bear habitat for bears in the state.

Opinions on Hunting

- A majority (70%) of Florida residents supported regulated hunting in general, while 22% opposed it.
- Slightly more Florida residents supported (48%) regulated hunting of black bears than opposed it (43%).
- The percent of respondents who supported hunting for black bear in Florida differed in each of the following situations:

- If FWC was monitoring the bear population and regulated hunting was compatible with maintaining healthy, sustainable populations, a majority (62%) supported bear hunting. Just over a quarter (28%) opposed it.
- If the goal of regulated hunting of black bears was to keep numbers at their current levels where populations are abundant and healthy, a majority (63%) supported bear hunting. Just under a third (30%) opposed it.