MEMORANDUM

To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Diane Eggeman, Director, Division of Hunting and Game Management
Date: June 24, 2015
Subject: Final Rules for Limited Bear Hunting Season

Purpose:
The purpose is for the Commission to take final action on rules to implement a bear hunting season for 2015.

Summary:
FWC is employing a multi-faceted approach for responding to expanding and increasing bear populations and to several severe attacks on humans. Part of this approach includes the use of hunting as the best and only feasible management tool for controlling growth of certain subpopulations of bears in Florida. At the February Commission meeting in Jacksonville, FWC staff presented an update on the comprehensive bear management approach based on FWC’s 2012 Bear Management Plan. At that meeting, the Commission directed staff to move forward with further developing several changes to rules and policies. These changes would put new tools in place to better manage the growing bear populations and help reduce human-bear conflicts, including reinstating a limited bear hunt in certain parts of Florida, beginning in 2015. The Commission further indicated that the 2015 hunt should be designed to be simple and conservative, to ensure continued sustainability. Staff then developed and presented draft rules for the hunt at the April Commission meeting. The Commission approved the rules to move forward for final consideration in June.

FWC sought out and received input on the proposed changes from a large number of people through emails, telephone calls, social media, the website, webinars, and at two Commission meetings where several hours of public testimony was heard. In addition to considering public input, FWC has a responsibility to consider scientific information, professional experience, cost effectiveness, and practical feasibility when choosing the most effective means to manage sustainable, healthy bear populations in balance with human safety and other public interests. Across the nation, in the vast majority of states where black bears are found, hunting has been proven to be the most effective and responsible management method for controlling bear populations.

Staff Recommendation:
Approve staff recommendation for a limited bear hunt in 2015 as proposed.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:
Diane Eggeman, Director, Division of Hunting and Game Management