This report covers the proposed final rule amendments related to bear hunting. Full text of all proposed rule amendments (Rules 68A-1.004, 4.001, 4.004, 9.007, 12.002, 12.003, 12.004, 12.007, 13.0001, 13.004, 15.005, 15.062, 15.063, 15.064, 15.065, 17.005, and 24.002, FAC), including technical changes and corrections, is included in the additional background material.
Hunting as a Tool to Manage Wildlife in North America

- Unregulated hunting can put populations at risk
- History of game management and regulated hunting across North America
  - Population recovery
  - Abundance
  - Sustainability
- Hunting is a proven population control method
- Nationwide surveys consistently show high public support for regulated hunting

Americans Attitudes Toward Hunting, Fishing and Target shooting 2011, National Shooting Sports Foundation.
Most states (32 of 41) that have resident black bear populations allow hunting and use harvest as a population management tool. The only states other than Florida in the United States that do not allow hunting have populations of less than 600 bears. Legal methods for harvesting bears in these other states include trapping, still hunting, hunting with dogs, and hunting over feeding stations.
FWC’s Human-Bear Conflict Management

- FWC is directly addressing
  - Education
  - Technical assistance
  - Rules and penalties concerning feeding
  - Removal of dangerous bears
  - Influencing communities and local governments regarding trash issues
- Hunting supports
  - Keeping population size in check
  - Fewer bears pushed into neighborhoods
  - Increasing wariness and fear of humans
Hunting opportunities would be based on the Bear Management Units (BMUs), as delineated in the 2012 FWC Bear Management Plan. BMUs form the geographic basis of bear management, allowing management approaches tailored for specific areas and subpopulations of bears. Management goals are for sustainable populations within each Bear Management Unit (BMU) based on the biological characteristics of the subpopulation.

Season would be open in the counties that make up 4 BMUs:

- **North BMU** – Baker, Columbia, Duval, Hamilton, Nassau, Suwannee, and Union counties.
- **Central BMU** – Alachua, Bradford, Brevard, Clay, Flagler, Lake, Marion, Orange, Putnam, Seminole, St. Johns, Sumter, and Volusia counties.
- **South BMU** – Broward, Collier, Hendry, Lee, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm Beach counties.

These BMUs are proposed for hunting because they have bear populations that are large enough to sustain a limited harvest: more than 200 bears according to the 2002 estimates. Bear hunting would be legal on all private and some public lands in these BMUs.
Proposed license and permit requirements:

Hunting license (unless exempt per 379.353, F.S.)

Bear permit (under Special-Use Rule from Statutory Authority):

- Nontransferable
- $100 resident, $300 nonresident
- No exemptions from permit requirements; persons who purchased lifetime licenses before 1998 would be exempt from permit fee.

FWC-managed areas:

- Management Area Permit would be required if hunting on FWC-managed areas.
- Quota permit would be needed if required by area-specific rule. (On some management areas, additional permits may be required by are-specific rule.)
Bear Permit Issuance

- No limit to number of permits issued (one per hunter)
- Permit sales end midnight on night before season begins
- Issued through license vendor or online (RLIS)

Harvest would be limited by harvest objectives for individual Bear Management Units.
This timing was chosen to coincide with high bear activity and before denning begins and also to avoid overlap with deer-dog hunting or training seasons. Cubs would be old enough to survive on their own.

The season would open on the Saturday before the last Saturday in October and close 6 days thereafter on a Friday. If a BMU's harvest objective is attained prior to the season close and on or after the second day of the season, that BMU's season would close at midnight on the day its harvest objective is attained. Therefore, the season would be at least 2 days long in any BMU.

The 2015 season dates would be 10/24 – 10/30.
This slide summarizes the proposed rules for methods-of-take.

Methods of take would include bows, crossbows, muzzleloading guns, rifles, pistols, revolvers, and shotguns, with restrictions on these the same as for deer hunting.

No baiting:

- Hunter and bear must both be more than 100 yards from a game feeding station when feed is present (see 68A-12.002(8) for rules concerning game feeding stations).
- No processed foods may be used at game feeding stations in BMUs with an established season for taking black bears.
- No feeding of any game is allowed currently on FWC-managed lands (e.g., Wildlife Management Areas).

No dogs allowed for hunting, but allow dogs on leashes for trailing shot bears.
Bag Limit and Other Rules

- Bag limit of one bear per person per season
- 100-lb minimum
- No harvest of bears with cub(s) present
- Daytime hunting only
- No sale of parts
- Wanton waste rule clarified
  - Harvested bears are commonly eaten
- Bears must be checked within 12 hours of recovery
  - May be field-dressed
  - Evidence of gender must be attached
  - Tagged and biological data collected at check station

Daytime hunting: one-half hour before sunrise until one-half hour after sunset.

Wanton waste rule would be clarified for all game (e.g., deer, turkeys, squirrels, quail): No one shall “...waste any game that has been wounded or killed by that person while hunting. For purposes of this paragraph, "waste" means to intentionally fail to make a reasonable effort to retrieve a wounded or killed animal and render it for consumption or use.”
Setting Harvest Objectives

- By Order of Executive Director, after approval of Commission
- Based on portion of BMU population available for harvest
- Biologically sustainable
- Flexibility to use most recent information and make adjustments

Proposed rule language: “The harvest objective for each BMU shall be as established by order of the Executive Director, after approval of the Commission, and shall be based on the proportion of the BMU population available for harvest, consistent with biologically sustainable population objectives for each BMU.”
This slide shows the four Bear Management Units that are proposed to be open for bear hunting, and illustrates a process for setting harvest objectives for each area. The population estimates are the most recent ones available, resulting from studies in 2002 (East Panhandle and South) and 2014 (North and Central). The FWC would like to stabilize the bear population in these four units, and therefore seeks to achieve 20% total mortality in each population. The proposed harvest objective takes 20% of the population estimate and then subtracts from that the recent average of annual known mortality. Annual known mortality includes the number of bears hit and killed by cars as well as the number of bears that the FWC captures and kills for conflict behavior. Because of annual variation in those numbers, we used an average of the last 3 years for both vehicle strikes and conflict-related removals to estimate the non-hunting mortality for 2015. The harvest objective for the South BMU was reduced to take into account that the Big Cypress National Preserve (i.e., Big Cypress Wildlife Management Area) would not be open for hunting as early as 2015.
Hunting on Public Lands

- 46 areas, 2 million acres
- Selection factors
  - Areas within bear range
  - Hunting opportunity within hunted BMUs
  - Existing hunting seasons (types and timing)
  - Landowner or partner-agency approval
The numbers on the slide correspond to the following list of Wildlife Management Areas (WMA)/Wildlife and Environmental Areas (WEA):
1. Box-R WMA
2. Aucilla WMA
3. Wakulla WMA
4. Tyndall Air Force Base
5. Apalachee WMA
6. Apalachicola WMA
7. Apalachicola - Bradwell Unit WMA
8. Fitzhugh Carter Tract, Econfina Creek WMA
9. Tate's Hell - Womack Creek Unit WMA
10. Juniper Creek WMA
11. Apalachicola River WEA
12. Chipola River WMA
13. Talquin WMA
14. Ochlockonee River WMA
15. Econfina Creek WMA
16. Big Bend - Hickory Mound Unit WMA
17. Big Bend - Spring Creek Unit WMA
18. Big Bend - Tide Swamp Unit WMA
19. Big Bend - Snipe Island Unit WMA
20. Twin Rivers WMA
21. Pine Log WMA
22. Tate's Hell WMA
23. Middle Aucilla WMA
24. Lower Econfina WMA
25. Beaverdam Creek WMA
The numbers on the slide correspond to the following list of Wildlife Management Areas (WMA):
1. Ralph E. Simmons WMA
2. Cary WMA
3. Cypress Creek WMA
4. Four Creeks WMA
5. Little River WMA
6. Osceola WMA
The numbers on the slide correspond to the following list of Wildlife Management Areas (WMA):
1. Bayard WMA
2. Lochloosa WMA
3. Rock Springs Run WMA
4. Ocala WMA
5. Raiford WMA
6. Seminole Forest WMA
7. Marshall Swamp WMA
8. Etoniah Creek WMA
9. Jumper Creek WMA
10. Tiger Bay WMA
11. Lake Monroe WMA
12. Belmore WMA
The numbers on the slide correspond to the following list of Wildlife Management Areas (WMA):
1. Spirit-of-the-Wild WMA
2. Picayune Strand WMA
3. Okaloacoochee Slough WMA
Engaging the Public

- BMU stakeholder meetings (7)
- Conference call with statewide technical assistance group
- Webinars (3)
- Public comments on website
- Comments received through other channels
Public Input Overview

- Themes in support of hunting:
  - Bear population sufficient to support hunting
  - Will reduce conflict
  - Needed to control population size
  - Restore tradition, allow youth to experience

- Themes in opposition to hunting:
  - Bear populations negatively affected by humans (habitat loss, too many people, people providing food)
  - Bear population size not sufficient
  - Hunting won’t address conflicts

- General:
  - Wait for updated population estimates
  - Many comments on methods and types of hunting
This slide and the next two provide some preliminary and tentative information about how the 2015 hunt would be administered. If hunting rules are approved by the Commission, over the next months, staff will develop and fine-tune these details, which are operational procedures rather than rules.
Implementation Details – Work in Progress

- Hunter education
  - Voluntary
  - Online
  - Webinar
  - E-mailed to permittees

- Permits
  - Valid in all BMUs with bear season
  - Customer to indicate in which BMU they plan to hunt (nonbinding)
  - Available August 3

- Post-season hunter survey - Hunter effort and satisfaction
Desired Outcomes

- Attainment of harvest objectives to stabilize bear populations
- Safe, responsible, and sustainable hunting opportunities
- Data to improve future decisions regarding hunting opportunities and population management
  - Hunter effort (how much, where and when)
  - Hunter success (harvest per hunter-day)
  - Hunter feedback
In conclusion, the Commission is considering reinstating bear hunting because bear conservation in Florida is a success story. Bear populations have recovered in large portions of the state. FWC’s responsibility is to conserve and manage the bear population for the public benefit, which means adding hunting into our approach. Despite the opposition, hunting is the best way we have to control population size and in that way to support conflict management. Permit revenue will be an additional funding source for bear conservation. An added benefit is to reinstate bear hunting as a sustainable use, and a responsible activity for the enjoyment and benefit of the Floridians and visitors who choose to participate.
The staff recommendation is for the Commission to approve the proposed amendments to Rules 68A-1.004, 4.001, 4.004, 9.007, 12.002, 12.003, 12.004, 12.007, 13.0001, 13.004, 15.005, 15.062, 15.063, 15.064, 15.065, 17.005, and 24.002, FAC, as advertised. If approved, rule amendments would become effective as soon as possible after filing.
Backup Material

The following slides are considered backup material and are not anticipated to be part of the actual presentation to the Commission.
Bears in Florida were hunted until 1994 when the season was closed to help reduce mortality factors on bears. Prior to 1936, there were no hunting protections for bears. Since then, progressively more restrictive regulations on hunting were put into place to manage the populations appropriately. In 1974 the state listed the bear as threatened with populations estimated as low as 300 – 500 bears. Hunting was closed in all but 3 counties until 1994 when the season was closed state-wide.