

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

From: Dr. Thomas Eason, Director, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation

Date: June 24, 2015

Subject: Revisions to Bear-related Rules and Policies

Purpose:

To strengthen FWC's bear conservation efforts, staff is requesting final approval of proposed changes to the wildlife feeding prohibitions under Administrative Code Rule 68A-4.001 and to the Florida Black Bear Conservation Rule (68A-4.009, F.A.C.). Additionally, staff is requesting approval of an agency policy paper and accompanying resolution on the importance of comprehensive waste management practices to bear conservation and human safety.

Summary:

As part of FWC's comprehensive approach to managing human- bear conflicts, staff has been working with stakeholders to strengthen bear-related statutes, conservation rules, and policies. Recently, FWC revised policies related to human- bear conflicts and the legislature passed an enhanced penalty structure for feeding violations. Now, staff is seeking final Commission approval of associated rule changes as well as a policy paper on waste management. For the feeding rule, subsection (3) of the rule would be amended to add coyotes to the list of species covered. Black bears would be removed from subsection (3) and a new subsection (4) would be created to specifically prohibit feeding of black bears. As requested by Commissioners at the April 2015 meeting, the new subsection differentiates intentional and unintentional feeding to increase clarification, and stipulates that a written notification is required before a citation is issued for unintentional feeding. The rule revisions will work in concert with the recently revised statutory penalty structure. The Black Bear Conservation rule was not changed from what was presented to the Commission in April.

Commissioners also directed staff to work on solutions for waste management issues because human-provided foods and attractants are the leading cause of human- bear conflicts. A policy document and accompanying resolution have been developed for commission consideration.

Staff Recommendation:

Approve the proposed rule revisions and resolution.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Dr. Thomas Eason, Director, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation