

Black Bear Management Plan
Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting (Region 1)
Tuesday, August 24, 2010, 10:00 am-4:00 pm
Lake Anna State Park

I. TECHNICAL DRAFT COMMENTS

Region 1 SAC Members: As you continue to review the technical draft of the 2011-2020 plan, please submit additional feedback and comments to andrea@responsivemanagement.com.

- Differences in hunters discussed in technical draft are clear and fascinating
- Clearly differentiate between hunters and poachers
- Cover / address the increase in poaching and poaching-related concerns (e.g., poaching for gall bladders)
- Include more discussion of educating the public on bear problems
- Discussion of compensation reads as if compensation is “off the table”; address compensation further
- Acknowledge hunting opinions vs. public opinions (how they differ) and reality vs. perception on certain issues

II. FINAL LIST OF ISSUES

Bear Population

- **Cultural carrying capacity (CCC) / public tolerance for bears**
 - Increasing number of bear sightings: bee hives, bird feeders, pet food
 - By locality:
 - Powhatan: not enough information
 - Albemarle: populations increasing
 - Spotsylvania: populations increasing
 - Prince William: not enough data
 - The decrease in habitat plus the increase in both bear and human populations causes problems; hunting can't control it.
 - Biological carrying capacity (BCC) and cultural carrying capacity (CCC) are on a collision course
- **Dog hunting**
 - Why hunt with dogs?
 - Dogs running through private property
 - Mistreatment of dogs apparent in some cases

- **Public awareness**
 - ~~Hunters may not know what tags on bears mean~~ (deleted at Aug. 24 meeting)
 - Education
 - Website
 - DVD—public
 - Outreach
 - Nuisance areas

- **Biological carrying capacity (BCC)**
 - Can bear population increase if habitat is decreasing?
 - Is there really an increase in the bear population or does it just appear so because there is a decrease in habitat? (VDGIF response: Indicator of population increase is hunter effort being the same yet more bears are harvested.)

- **Population management options**
 - Is hunting sufficiently managing the bears?
 - How can we keep hunting as a viable management option / educate those opposed to hunting about the importance of hunting as a management tool?
 - How can we enhance habitat for bears (as part of population management if population is increasing)?

- **Poaching / illegal activities**
 - Bear baiting (illegal activities) may affect population size

Bear Habitat

- **Changing habitat**
 - Hard mast as bulk of bears' diet—forests changing to maple, oaks being eaten before they grow
 - Oak decline; oaks are dying
 - Climate change; how will it affect habitat?
 - 961 square miles of forest lost in Virginia each year and number of houses increasing
 - Timber profits in pines versus oaks; loss of mast
 - Land use issues
 - Virginia habitat coordination

- **Habitat loss / fragmentation**
 - Habitat loss
 - Future habitat loss and quality
 - Habitat loss and quality may control bear population alone
 - Habitat fragmentation, subadult movement to new areas – competition for food supply, biological carrying capacity decreases with fragmentation

- **Habitat protection and improvement**
 - Bear habitat improvement plan on large scale may be difficult – lots of things the VDGIF can't control, but does have incentives
 - Make riparian habitat corridor protection / restoration a priority

- Engage in habitat management that considers other species

Bear-Related Recreation

➤ **Consumptive bear-related recreation**

- Deer and turkey hunters may not know how to hunt bear
 - educate hunters on what to do if they encounter a bear
 - to increase opportunities, need to introduce hunters to how to bear hunt
- Hunters are only a means of control
- Types of hunting: archery and firearms, black powder
- VDGIF is biased in bear management approach (a self-serving bias)
 - Promoting hunting with dogs but public views this negatively
 - Promoting deer hunter bear harvest (those who harvest bears opportunistically while deer hunting)
- Why do we hunt bears? Need to clarify reasons / motivations for hunting bear

➤ **Nonconsumptive bear-related recreation**

- Enthusiasm about sightings varies by locality: In Williamsburg, people don't want more bears; in Carolina County, people are glad to see them
- Fear
- Interest adds to experience
- Natural resources tourism, economic driver

➤ **Bear-related recreation overall**

- Allocation of recreation

Human-Bear Problems

➤ **Response to human-bear problems**

- Nuisance complaints; reaction of authorities, response
- Darting, trapping, relocating
- Budget concerns
- Political pressure
- Pressure on localities regarding children, pets, etc.
- Sensationalizing issues
- Overreaction
- Feedback regarding complaints
- Chronic complaints or “nuisance nuisance complaints”
- Agency coordination; state and local officials
- Need consistent response – formulate specific response and adhere to them from the local level up
- Who is responsible for handling nuisance bear?
- Orphan cubs
 - What should be done?
 - What is the priority (individual bear vs. population as whole)
 - Cost / resources for individual bear rehab

- **Agricultural damage**
 - Agriculture—money
 - Compensation—who pays? Insurance? Hunting fees? Taxpayers?
 - If license fees increase, this may mean fewer hunters and fewer areas to hunt
 - Fewer public acres
 - Fewer license buyers, less money to manage / maintain land

- **Human populations contributing to bear behavior**
 - Feeding bears
 - Intentional and unintentional
 - Bees—occasional problems

- **Education / prevention**
 - Bear proof trash containers for homeowners – require to use
 - Educate those who feed bird in “bear country” on when to avoid feeding
 - Restrictions on bird feeding in certain months
 - Need for education guidelines regarding garbage can and recycling bin design – especially in public areas

- **Bear / vehicle collisions**
 - Not sure an issue (VDGIF: Require to report; very few reported)
 - Road mortality prevention

Other Issues

- **Funding issues**
 - Need funding to accomplish goals
 - Find ways to increase VDGIF budget

- **Compensation program issues**
 - Efficacy of compensation programs

III. STRATEGIES AND ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Strategies/Other Comments Regarding Bear Populations

- Fewer bears in Area 1 but increasing, so most counties in the region allow bear hunting; fewer hunters in the region than in the rest of Commonwealth, but may increase. Longer hunting season, too.
- Last 10 years, no unprovoked attacks by black bears in Virginia
- Increase hunting opportunities in appropriate areas
- Increase more state lands, corporate donations, and tax exemptions to help enhance habitat for bears (as part of population management if population is increasing)
- Increase the number of female bears killed to address the issue of biological carrying capacity (BCC) and cultural carrying capacity (CCC) disparity

Strategies/Other Comments Regarding Bear Habitat

- Contiguous migration corridors probably not a critical need as might be for other species.
- As communities grow, need to improve quality of habitat; move away from species-specific habitat.
- Compact connected communities
- Replacement habitat: timber companies, tree farmers should plant appropriate trees for habitat, not just garbage trees. Trees with mast, variety. Appropriate native trees.
- Replant trees for diversity for logging operations

Strategies/Other Comments Regarding Bear-Related Recreation

- Information management: teach people where to go to see bears
- Education is key for hunters and for citizens; safety, one factor
- Bear viewing for recreation, by webcam?
- Increase bear sighting opportunities by rehabbing cubs in wild area but providing public opportunity to view them being rehabbed in the wild

Strategies/Other Comments Regarding Human-Bear Problems

- Game office: answering machine only without a live person not a help in the event of a sighting and upset citizen
- Education: Important to give the general public information re: human/bear issues. Outreach.
- Education and children: for DVD, identify SOLs that apply; educate teachers, train them.
- Public outreach campaign: TV messages targeted to adults, residents of specific areas.
- Nuisance bears: contact that neighborhood group—phone calls? Brochure
- Animal control agencies should interface with DGIF. County defines the issue.
- Educate beekeepers to put electric fence up first before hives.
- Need a standardized response from local officials—across the state, in conjunction with state officials. Defined categories of complaints (category 1 complaint, category 2, etc.) with similar responses statewide.
- Develop a state policy. Involve local officials, game department, police, and the public. Administer it through the game department.
- Homeowners Associations information meetings with animal control officers, DVDs (Spotsylvania)—a good model. State or local officials invited.
- Educate localities starting with the public – then local official on complaint categories
- Local volunteer bear coordinator / educator for bear issues

Additional Strategies/Other Comments

- Education: use Smokey the Bear website for children / schools to educate on bears
- Manage forest for profits to maintain forest
- Pay raise for bear project leader
- Education strategies
 - A “bear country” logo, sign, website, coordinated campaign
 - Work up curricula on bear management (food chain, ecosystem issues) for elementary school kids

IV. DRAFT VALUES

Bear Population

2001 Plan Values

- Ensure the long-term viability of bear populations in all areas ~~except northern Piedmont and northern Tidewater~~
 - Suggested revision: delete “except northern Piedmont and northern Tidewater.”
- ~~Comprehensive~~ research, monitoring, ~~management~~, education, and protection programs
 - Suggested revision: Base management decisions on scientific research, monitoring, education, and protection programs.
- Maintain bear populations at levels compatible with ~~land use, property concerns, and recreational opportunities; i.e., at~~ cultural carrying capacity
 - Suggested revision: Maintain bear populations at levels compatible with cultural carrying capacity (CCC).
 - Additional comments on revision: adapt to changing CCC
- Even if CCC is exceeded, population viability is more important
 - Value still valid
 - Additional comment: this is a public relations (PR) issue

Value Statements Identified for 2011-2020

- “Manage” cultural carrying capacity to meet current and projected bear population goals
- Utilize hunting as an effective management tool for bear populations
 - Additional comment: as needed
- Maintain bear population in some areas at biological carrying capacity (e.g., National Park)
 - Additional comment indicated disagreement with this as a stated value

Bear Habitat

2001 Plan Values Identified as Valid for 2011-2020 (with one suggested revision)

- Conserve black bear habitat consistent with ~~bear population~~ objectives.
 - Suggested revision: “Conserve black bear habitat consistent with overall stewardship objectives.
- Habitat conservation should emphasize areas of special significance (e.g., areas with source populations and habitat linkages).
- Habitat conservation may consist of habitat management or protection.

Value Statements Identified for 2011-2020

- Riparian corridors – protected. Bears serve as an “umbrella species” to conserve other species.
- Manage habitat for the benefit of multiple species (including bear).
- Increase areas under state law to provide more wildlife habitat (e.g., conservation easement, private property, state parks, etc.)
- Promote stewardship with local landowners.

Bear-Related Recreation

2001 Plan Values Identified as Valid for 2011-2020

- Provide a diversity of hunting opportunities
- Hunting is a management tool
- Hunting as a recreational experience
- Discourage or prohibit activities that prevent attainment of population objectives
- Hunting methods (chase & take included) are fair and sportsmanlike
- Hunting activities respect the rights of private property owners
- Hunting activities respect the rights of other Virginia citizens
- Provide opportunities for non-hunting recreation
- Non-hunting recreation should minimize negative human-bear interactions
- Non-hunting recreation should focus on information & education

Value Statements Identified for 2011-2020

- Ecocentric value – having bears as part of natural ecosystem
- Bears – flagship species for education
- Economic, ecotourism value – hotels, small towns
- Hunting – available, opportunities to hunt, humane, variation in area-specific hunting opportunities (e.g., population control where needed)
- Hunting for recreation, as part of tradition, chase not harvesting
- Observation leads to appreciation, sighting opportunities
- A designated continuum of hunted populations of bears from all hunted to no-hunting populations (research, as in HIP questions for birds – can track populations and needs in different areas with bear check survey similar to HIP questions for birds)
- Dogs – use as recreation with bears; respect for landowners
- Safety – safe hunting
- Hunted bears / wildlife should be utilized (e.g., eaten)

Human-Bear Interactions

2001 Plan Values Identified as Valid for 2011-2020 (with one suggested revision)

- Promote human safety
- Protect personal income
- Protect personal property
- Should still attain population and recreation objectives while protecting people, ~~property, and income~~
 - Suggested revision: delete protecting “property and income”
 - Use “nuisance” solutions that maintain bear populations and recreational value

Value Statements Identified for 2011-2020

- Responsibility for costs: public responsibility for awareness and education, private responsibility for your actions with a public resource (e.g., wildlife)
- Keep bears wild
- Promote human safety

- Additional comment: by encouraging / enforcing good bear-safe practice
- Enact regulation
- Promote appreciation of wildlife and their needs
- Promote consistent citizen and local responsibility to keep bears wild
- Establish consistent response to complaints