

REGION 2 MEETING MINUTES

Black Bear Management Plan Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting

Tuesday, June 29, 2010, 1:40-3:15 pm

Virginia Department of Forestry

Attendees

Stuart Baynes, Mecklenburg County

stuart.bayne@va.usda.gov

Curtis Crump, Landowner, Amherst County

crumpmtcottage@pngusa.net

David Hayes, Landowner, Henry County

davidhayes@kimbanet.com

Gary Heiser, Appomattox-Buckingham State Forest, Cumberland County

gary.heiser@dof.virginia.gov

David Martin, Campbell County

dmartin07@me.com

Ralph Reynolds, Landowner, Appomattox County

(434) 352-7766

Don Schwab, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Chesapeake County

donald_schwab@fws.gov

Bill Sgrinia, Virginia Recreation and Parks Society, Pittsylvania

sgrinia@ci.danville.va.us

Stuart Ward, Charlotte County

stuart.ward@va.usda.gov

Helen Warriner-Burke, Southside SPCA, Amelia County

ballybrack@tds.net

Absent

Michael Bailey, ML and Archery, Lunenburg County

bacadog65@yahoo.com

Bobby Oakes, Heart of Virginia Bee Keepers, Prince Edward County

(434) 392-5554 Home/(434) 547-5408 Cell

Mark Moody, Virginia Bear Hunters Association, Petersburg County

baitdragr@comcast.net

Note that a complete listing of SAC members, including telephone numbers and email information will be distributed to the entire group.

Meeting Goals

- Introductions (including those who were absent)
- Identify and discuss bear-related issues for your region
- Establish dates and locations for future SAC meetings and the best ways to communicate amongst your regional group and the statewide group
- Recommend any other individuals or organizations that should have representation on the regional SAC

Identification of Issues

Bear Population Discussion Segment

Issues Identified

Cultural carrying capacity/public tolerance for bears

- Increase in bear populations in the past 4 to 5 years
- Population explosion for bear and concerns that bear are becoming more of a nuisance and reaching cultural carrying capacity
- Increase in bear in or around neighborhoods
- Perception of population densities differ between those in mountainous regions (who believe there has been only a slight if any increase in the population) and those in neighborhoods/suburban/urban areas (who believe there is a dramatic increase)
- Has the bear population has gotten out of hand?
- Concern over how the increased populations impact local farming/agricultural businesses, economic impact

Biological carrying capacity

- Even if there is good habitat, there is only a certain amount bears will tolerate from other bears – spread to other locations and other range
- Looking at how to address the bear populations based on the differences between each county and region

Controlling bear populations

- Hunting as an effective management tool, relocation seems to be not as economically conducive
- County-by-county season controls

Strategies/Other Comments

- Whereas deer encounters were once minimal, now deer are becoming more of a nuisance; concerns that the same thing could happen with bear populations
- Evidence of an increase in bear populations: increase in bear/motor vehicle collisions, increase of bear sightings in or around neighborhoods
- Problems with illegal activities, such as bear baiting, may be causing an increase in the population as well as an increase in aggressiveness

Bear Habitat Discussion Segment

Issues Identified

Changing habitat quality

- Land use changes; growth and development limiting habitat, particularly in southeastern Virginia

- Bears coming to farms and crops to look for food, indicating limited quantity or quality of natural food sources
- Rivers as corridors or roadways for bear concentrations

Strategies/Other Comments

- Conservation easements to protect bear habitats
- Suggest looking at the deer management plan when developing bear management efforts
- Decrease in habitat contributing to the increase in bear sightings and resulting in more human-bear encounters

Bear-Related Recreation Discussion Segment

Issues Identified

General bear hunting issues

- Hunting as a legitimate bear management tool
- Importance of providing diverse hunting opportunities for all kinds of hunting, including bowhunting and hound hunting
- Ensuring regulation/enforcement of hunting laws and seasons
- Concerns about unethical/illegal hunter behavior
- Bear hunting as a way to engage new hunters, increase interest
- Hunting opportunities in high density areas
- Awareness and discourse between all different kinds of hunters, including deer hunters
- Spring bear season

Dog hunting

- Landowner concerns – dog and bear hunters on private property, trespassing
- Property rights

Bear Baiting

- Concerns regarding changes in bear behavior–habituation and aggression

Strategies/Other Comments

- Enforcement of the laws currently in place for hunting more important than developing new regulations
- Hunter education should include a focus on the need to hunt bears as a bear management tool and that deer hunters (other hunters, in general) should be made aware of the need to hunt bear
- There was some discussion regarding bear baiting during hunting season
- It was suggested that a spring bear season could be offered
- Although hunting was seen as a way to control bear populations, there is some concern over hunting ethics and responsibility.
- The group suggested that there could be additional incentives for hunters who hunt bear on agricultural lands.

Human-Bear Problems Discussion Segment

Issues Identified

Nuisance issues were divided into two categories for the discussion: bad bear behavior and bear damage.

Bad bear behavior

- Examples of bad bear behavior included bears utilizing easy food sources, such as trash and birdfeeders, but not necessarily taking much money out of an individual's pockets.

Bear Damage

- Examples of bear damage included substantial agricultural/business damage as well as threats to human life.

Human populations contributing to nuisance behavior

- Intentional and unintentional human attractants contributing to increased bear sightings:
 - legal activities such as birdfeeding, improper trash storage
 - illegal activities such as bear baiting and illegal wildlife feeding
 - unintentional attractions such as farms and crops
- Public awareness, education, and information—Bear Smart and Bear Networks
- Fear and inexperience as contributors to nuisance behavior

Urbanization and development—people in bear country

- Concerns regarding new people coming into areas who are inexperienced with living with bears
- Balancing bear-human cohabitation

Bear Habituation

- Bears habituated to people; bears have learned to live in coexistence with human populations and have become accustomed to people as part of their ecosystem

Response to human-bear problems

- Importance of protecting private property and agricultural lands from bear damage, including farms, orchards, and crops
- May be problematic due to location-specific guidelines
- Responsiveness of authorities to hunting issues and human-bear conflict issues
- Partnerships between agencies

Strategies/Other Comments

- In general, the group suggested that the best way to prevent bear nuisances was to increase public awareness. Some ideas included:
 - Signs around the state that informed people that they were in bear country and offered guidance on bear-human encounters
 - Websites on how to handle bears
 - Programs designed to teach people how to take care of their trash and garbage so it doesn't become a bear attractant
 - Information on how to obtain compensation for agricultural or personal property damage
- The group mentioned the need for collaboration between programs (e.g., VDGIF, law enforcement) as an integral part of management efforts. Some suggested partnerships and collaboration between agencies, including schools and education programs designed to prevent illegal behavior (i.e., bear baiting program).
- There was general consensus that public education is integral to bear management efforts because a lack of knowledge and exposure could lead to fear and, in general, the public does not know what to look for or where to go for control.

Upcoming Meetings

The group discussed possible upcoming meeting locations. The group agreed that the 2-3 upcoming meetings should be held in a central location instead of different locations. The group agreed that the Farmville/Lynchburg area was optimal. Specific site locations included:

- State police headquarters in Appomattox
- Longwood University

Potential dates

- Although a specific date was not determined, the group suggested late-August for the next meeting.

Suggestions regarding other individuals/organizations that should be represented

- Commonwealth Attorneys
- Game Wardens
- As a caveat to these suggestions, the VDGIF has tried to minimize the number of government representatives engaged in the bear management planning process.

Action Items

1. Responsive Management to provide meeting minutes for regional group breakout sessions
2. Responsive Management to coordinate second meeting locations, dates, and times for each region
3. Responsive Management to develop a clearinghouse online for access to meeting materials and distribute all information to SAC members
4. VDGIF to identify additional regional representatives for SACs
5. SAC members to review the technical portion of the bear management plan in preparation for the next SAC regional meeting
6. SAC members to begin thinking about issues identified and values associated with these issues for upcoming meeting