

Black Bear Management Plan
Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting (Region 2)
Tuesday, August 31, 2010, 10:00 am-4:00 pm
Prince Edward County Virginia Cooperative Extension Office, Farmville

I. TECHNICAL DRAFT COMMENTS

Region 2 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.

- Too long
- Not sure how it will be used
- Concerned about the use of public opinion surveys in the plan because of those with an opinion but no knowledge and those who don't have an opinion

II. FINAL LIST OF ISSUES

Bear Population

- **Cultural carrying capacity (CCC) / 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
 - Not an explosion across the state
 - “Explosion” is also a perception issue
 - 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 (BCC)**
 - 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~~ Region-by-region season controls (edited at Aug. 31 meeting)
 - Local management
 - VDGIF: do not need control on as fine a level as county, but have areas
 - Hunting is an effective management tool; need to provide more opportunities
 - What other management tools (other than hunting) do we have?
 - Is the bear hunting season too late to control populations effectively?
 - Do we have the need for or the option for damage permits on agricultural land as the bear population increases?
- **Tracking the population**
 - Educating bear hunters to help improve data accuracy (through more accurate hunter reporting once they are educated on why it is important to report accurately)
- **Population objectives**
 - VDGIF: What population objectives should we have? Should we increase, keep the same, or decrease the bear population?

Bear Habitat

- **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
 - Bear populations moving to this area
 - Forest replacement; need hardwood instead of pine
 - Need to maintain travel corridors for the bear for bear population mobility and health

Bear-Related Recreation

- **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
 - Provide more hunting where there are more bears
 - Hunting opportunities in high density areas
 - Awareness and discourse between all different kinds of hunters, including deer hunters
 - Spring bear hunting season will starve / orphan cubs
 - Concern a wounded bear will hurt someone if shot by deer hunter who does not know what he/she is doing
 - Should not be a firearms bear season during deer dog season

- Opportunistic (deer hunters shooting bear) hunting occurs
- Need to educate other hunters about bears and bear hunting
- Underreporting
- Seeing an increase in unethical hunting behaviors
- VDGIF: How should the Department allocate hunting opportunities?

➤ **Dog hunting / bear baiting**

- Landowner concerns – dog and bear hunters on private property, trespassing
- Property rights
- Unethical hunting with dogs, guns on private property are a problem
- Concerns regarding changes in bear behavior – habituation and aggression
- Illegal feeding
- Lack of enforcement of illegal hunting practices (e.g., baiting)

➤ **Tourism**

Human-Bear Problems

➤ **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
- Not really a threat to human life
 - Perhaps a perception issue? Address this perception in the plan

➤ **Human populations contributing to bear 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
 - Inexperience includes pet food and other repetitive human behavior that attracts bears
 - Fear – bears are a “problem” just because person saw one

➤ **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
- Need to educate those who live in or move to bear country

- **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~~ (deleted at Aug. 31 meeting)
 - Responsiveness of authorities to hunting issues and human-bear conflict issues
 - Partnerships between agencies
 - Inconsistent responses to nuisance issues
 - Did the VDGIF bring bear into the area without the public knowing?
 - VDGIF: Was probably a nuisance response – removed and relocated a nuisance bear to Department land
 - VDGIF: Whose responsibility is a nuisance bear?
- **Kill permits**
 - Kill permits are too limited
 - Reporting compliance and/or data collection on kill permits
 - Need system for more accurate data
 - May be underreported to VDGIF (does not match Dismal Swamp data)
 - Educate bear hunters to help improve reporting / data accuracy in hunting
- **Bears and other animals**
 - Is there a problem between bears and other animals, domestic or farm / livestock?
 - VDGIF: Not particularly common, livestock depredation is area-specific

Other Issues

- **Orphan cubs**
 - What does the VDGIF do with orphan cubs?
 - Manage for the population (because individual orphan cubs are not important population-wise) VS. compassion/responsibility for individual orphaned cubs?

III. STRATEGIES AND ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Strategies/Other Comments Regarding Bear Populations

- 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
- Have a spring bear season
- Data to determine CCC

- Hunter harvest data
- Localized survey / statewide survey at least at beginning of each plan development process

Strategies/Other Comments Regarding Bear Habitat

- 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

Strategies/Other Comments Regarding Bear-Related Recreation

- Enforcement of the laws currently in place for hunting more important than developing new regulations
- Adequate law enforcement
- 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.

Strategies/Other Comments Regarding Human-Bear Problems

- Have a trained volunteer to respond to and/or educate the public when they call with bear nuisance problems
- 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 human-bear 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
- Need 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.
- Local government should respond to problems

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~~ statewide.
 - Suggested revision: delete “in all areas except northern Piedmont and northern Tidewater” and make it statewide
 - Suggested revision: change “long-term viability” to healthy populations
- Comprehensive research, monitoring, management, education, and protection programs
 - Suggested revision: protection programs should be clarified or changed to protection of bear
 - Additional comment: Management should be based on best, most accurate, comprehensive information
- Maintain bear populations at levels compatible with ~~land use, property concerns, and recreational opportunities; i.e.,~~ at cultural carrying capacity
 - Additional comments:
 - Balance between bears and human populations
 - Manage for CCC
 - Rely on data to determine CCC
- Even if CCC is exceeded, population viability is more important
 - No comments on whether this value is still valid

Value Statements Identified for 2011-2020

- Having bears around (is important)
- Ecosystem value
 - Intrinsic value of native wildlife
 - Bear is key species in Region 2 (particularly the Dismal Swamp) (i.e., bear is a predator, part of life cycle, and controls own population)
 - Economics

Bear Habitat

2001 Plan Values Identified as Valid for 2011-2020

- Conserve black bear habitat consistent with bear population objectives.
 - Still valid
- Habitat conservation should emphasize areas of special significance (e.g., areas with source populations and habitat linkages).
 - No specific comments on this value
- Habitat conservation may consist of habitat management or protection.
 - No specific comments on this value

Value Statements Identified for 2011-2020

- Provide and protect habitat for all bear life states (i.e., feeding, etc.)
- Bear habitat has value for human population as well

- Well-maintained riparian areas – bear need corridors to move, for food, etc.
 - Need for all wildlife (not just bears)
- Population objectives should reflect habitat availability (rather than habitat having to be attained to reach population objectives)
 - Actually the opposite approach of the first 2001 bear habitat value

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

- Hunting is a legitimate bear management tool
- Diversity of bear-related recreation and opportunities
 - Hunting
 - Wildlife watching
 - Ecotourism
- Maximize how hunting revenue is spent for education and recreation opportunities
- Human safety
- Promoting educated and informed bear-related recreation
 - Increasing public education and awareness regarding hunting ethics, how to interact with bear, etc.
- Promote bear welfare (specific example given of how the timing of chase season is not in the best interest of the bear)
- Diverse hunting opportunities
- Adequate law enforcement
- Ethical / legal hunting practices
- Bears have recreational, non-hunting value to all citizens
- No artificial eco-tourism
- Promoting non-hunting recreation opportunities / activities / participation should be a priority (not just information and education)
 - Was in reaction to the last 2001 bear-related recreation value that says non-hunting recreation should focus on information and education
- Non-hunting bear recreation should be given more importance than it currently is (in comparison to bear hunting)

Human-Bear Problems

2001 Plan Values Identified as Valid for 2011-2020

- Promote human safety
- Protect personal income
- Protect personal property
- Should still attain population and recreation objectives while protecting people, property, and income
 - Additional comment: Protection of property and income should “trump” population objectives

Value Statements Identified for 2011-2020

- Balancing human-bear populations for CCC
- Consistent / correct response not only within agencies but between agencies
- Shared public / agency responsibility for problem issues
- Hunting is preferred management tool (over kill permits, etc.)
- Educating the public regarding human-bear relations
- Farmers’ ability to produce profitable crops
- Keep bears wild / bear welfare (not depend on food from humans, such as feeding, etc., in neighborhoods, but not sure what to do about crops)