

Black Bear Management Plan
Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting (Region 3)
Tuesday, August 3, 2010, 10:00 am-4:00 pm
U.S. Forest Service Supervisor's Office, Roanoke

I. TECHNICAL DRAFT COMMENTS

Region 3 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.

- Think percentage of bear hunters without dogs was high
- Preservation stamp might be better than a damage stamp (prevent damage)
- Is it important to classify types of hunters?
- “Lumping” of dog training season and hunting—needs to be clarified
- See more information on how population indices are derived; more information on how population estimates have been calculated for the plan

II. FINAL LIST OF ISSUES

Bear Population

- **Hunting as a way of controlling bear populations**
 - Hunting doesn't seem to be controlling bear populations
 - Seeing increasing or stable but high black bear populations
 - Black bear population is high, and bear hunting is not reducing the population much
 - Hunting is not having a big enough impact
 - Are dog hunters too selective in their kill (wanting only male bears) and/or are they not harvesting enough to manage the population?
 - Dog hunters more interested in chasing and not killing
 - Hunting choices and regulations (i.e., deciding not to kill a bear unless it is a “trophy” bear and not being able to kill a mother bear with cubs, etc.) affect the population (i.e., by limiting how many bears are harvested)
 - Many hunters don't take the opportunity to kill a bear, even if they have a chance; they would rather watch them
 - People hesitant to hunt or kill bears, contributing to the population increase
 - Past history of not being able to hunt bears, populations declining – people remember this and are more hesitant to hunt or shoot bears
 - Bear meat isn't considered as palatable and rugs are expensive, which may be another reason why people might not kill bears
 - There is a changing trend of hunters not killing at every opportunity, especially for deer

- Meat preference may be a reason hunters hesitate to harvest bear; they prefer venison
 - Concerns regarding hunters' abilities to identify legal bears given the current guidelines on weight, etc.
 - Constraints to hunting bears affects decisions to harvest
- **Cultural carrying capacity/public tolerance for bears**
- Populations have increased (and that is a good thing), but not where people shouldn't be able to tolerate it
- **Current versus sustainable populations**
- More and better data is needed (e.g., using hunters' field reports to provide population data)
 - More research is needed on the influence of bear "refugees" (e.g., Shenandoah National Park, remote USFS lands) on the surrounding lands
 - Managing for a balance in bear, deer, and other wildlife populations
- **Statewide versus localized populations**
- Population increases are especially important for Southside and Southwestern areas
 - Black bear populations have social, economic, and recreational implications; black bear population is a benefit (e.g., tourism, economy, outdoor recreation, etc.)

Bear Habitat

- **Changing habitat quality**
- Land use shifting from agriculture to urbanization and retirement homes (at least in some places like Rappahannock)
 - Concern about hard mast failures
 - Concern about changing habitat / forest composition (e.g., oaks to maple)
 - Increasing number of small & underweight bears (maybe due to a mast relationship?)
 - Concern about the aging forests on USFS lands – long-term loss of oak/hickory forest – habitat is changing
 - Lack of clearcuts on USFS lands, resulting in less soft mast production
 - Concern about gypsy moth
 - Loss of mast in some areas may be reason bears are coming into developed areas, farms, crops to look for food
 - While timber harvesting has decreased over the past 30 years, in the past 10 years, the Forest Service has grown a burn program to 20,000 acres a year, providing diversity of habitat
- **Impacts of other wildlife on habitat**
- Deer impacts on habitat quality (e.g., decline in oak regeneration and mast production)
- **Long-term planning for habitat changes**
- Planning for bear management needs to be longer term (i.e., more than 10 years) to manage continuing changes in bear habitat due to development, etc. and subsequently the increase in bear/human interactions

Bear-Related Recreation

- **Allocation of resources among different types of hunters/recreationists**
- **General bear hunting issues**
 - Concern about unscrupulous hunters
 - Hunting interests seem to be moving toward deer hunting and trophy hunting, rather than bear hunting
 - Hunter uncertainties about killing a bear because not all bears are legal (e.g., females with cubs, too small)
- **Dog hunting**
 - Issue with hunter rights to retrieve dogs on private property and landowner rights
 - More hunters are against the chase season
 - Public and hunter concerns about hound hunting
 - Problem is that hound hunters are a minority and different
 - Hunting and chasing are two different things and shouldn't be lumped together; the two are different for hunters but not necessarily for bear, landowners, etc.
- **Chase season**
 - Need more time with dogs in the woods
 - It is unnerving to have free-ranging bear hounds cross your property – especially if you have a dog
 - Does chasing bears with dogs get them habituated to dogs? Probably not
 - During chase season, bears/dogs often move into and cause conflicts in no-hunting recreation areas on USFS lands, but bears also run to most remote areas
 - Landowners often end up with dogs and bear hunters on private property, resulting in conflicts and trespass concerns
 - Different than hunting to actually kill a bear, chase may be considered simply as harassment, which some people have a problem with
 - Chase season may increase interest in bear-related recreation
- **Impact of bear hunting and/or chase on bear**
 - Information and research regarding undesirable/adverse affects of chase on bears
 - Chase season's impact on bear health and morbidity; capture myopathy?
 - Sow and cub separation as a result of hunt/chase
- **Non-hunting wildlife recreation and observation**
 - There is an issue about getting information (and the correct information) to the public – maybe using bear cams or other web-based systems
 - Public land is important to provide opportunities for bear-related recreation, probably more so in other regions
 - Some people are afraid to walk/hike in bear country

Human-Bear Interactions

- **People contributing to nuisance behavior**
 - People not taking/following advice to eliminate bear problems
 - Improper food/trash storage
 - Birdfeeders are a problem
 - Illegal feeding of wildlife or bears
 - How to pay for extra needs; who should pay?
 - Concern about enforcement issues and follow-up to enforce feeding laws
 - Public education/awareness
 - Bear-human interactions may be higher than reported as a result of it being illegal to accidentally feed bear
 - Hikers, food, caching/“trail magic”

- **Urbanization and development—people in bear country**
 - Development, such as new homes, buildings, and roads, are resulting in more human-bear interaction
 - Problem with new residents moving to rural areas (bear habitat) from more urban areas, creating more nuisance opportunities and chances to see bear
 - Lots of people
 - Lots of people living next to refuges, WMAs, or abundant habitat (e.g., Havens WMA, Shenandoah National Park, National Forests), leading to more confrontation
 - Issues with people moving into bear country
 - Problems with transient visitors to campgrounds; they would be unaware of existing habituated bear conflicts—possibly dangerous

- **Bear behavior**
 - Bears still come to corn/feeders from existing natural habitat; they’ve learned to eat corn and unnatural food
 - Concern about rain barrel damage (Rappahannock)
 - How to keep bears from people

- **Injured/orphaned bear cubs**
 - There is no outlet to deal with orphaned cubs – sometimes people try to raise them on their own
 - People trying to raise bear cubs; could be a combination of reasons, including increased population resulting in more cubs or people not getting the response they want from organizations they contact for help with bear issues
 - Need for clean resolution pathway run by professionals

- **Health and safety issues**
 - Bear on roads, people hitting bear with car; bear harder to see on road at night
 - People trying to raise bear cubs results in health and safety hazards and risks

- **Education**
 - Lack of education allowing conflicts to increase
 - Increase geographic scope of education programs to suburban/urban areas

- **“Problem” bears being re-released**
- **Fox hound training preserves**
- **Enforcement issues**
 - Clarification/consistency in implementing bear management policy
 - Balance of law enforcement
 - Who is responsible when people attract bears?

III. STRATEGIES AND ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Strategies/Other Comments Regarding Bear Populations

- Debate over whether Shenandoah National Park, Skyline Drive, and Blue Ridge Parkway are a source for bears
- Opportunity to increase bear hunting seasons/limits in areas with higher population/damage
- Manage bear populations more locally (regulations)
- We need to allow DMAP Operators in the state to check bear if you want more bear harvested
- Facilitate checking process

Strategies/Other Comments Regarding Bear Habitat

- What us the federal/state government doing about the changing forest composition? Can anything be done?

Strategies/Other Comments Regarding Bear-Related Recreation

- Who writes tickets for birdfeeders? Game warden? VDGIF?
- Examine survey results among landowners
- Averse conditioning—chase, allow chase out of season? Other options?
- Sell more options
- Possible hunts in same places believed to have higher bear populations to help with counts and bring in money
- Expand hunting season to increase harvest
 - Second week of muzzleloader
 - Opening week of rifle season

Strategies/Other Comments Regarding Human-Bear Interactions

- Focus on getting bears away from people
- Use aversive conditioning
- Education

IV. DRAFT VALUES

Bear Population

2001 Plan Values Identified as Valid for 2011-2020

- Ensure the long-term viability of bear populations in all areas except northern Piedmont and northern Tidewater
 - New suggestion to revise value, replacing “northern Piedmont” with “northern Virginia.”
- Comprehensive research, monitoring, management, education, and protection programs
- Maintain bear populations at levels compatible with land use, property concerns, and recreational opportunities; i.e., at cultural carrying capacity
- Even if cultural carrying capacity (CCC) is exceeded, population viability is more important

Value Statements Identified for 2011-2020

- Assess regional bear status for opportunities to increase or maintain population
- Increase regional management (smaller zones)
- Minimize translocation of bears for release
- Better tools for assessing population numbers
- Control population by longer season/increased hunts
- Lack of statewide viability
- Focus on interface between human/bear habitat
- Determine current versus sustainable populations
- Is viability valid anymore?
- Northern Virginia; refine/change viability zones
- Northern Piedmont—too large?

Bear Habitat

- Conserve black bear large-scale habitats consistent with bear population objectives by providing incentives and assistance to landowners (TNC, etc.)
- Habitat conservation should emphasize areas of special significance and sanctuaries in areas of decreasing populations (i.e., Southwest Virginia)
- Habitat conservation may consist of habitat management or protection
- Assist and promote the management of mast crop as it relates to black bear populations (via tax credits, etc.)
- Promote conservation methods by educating on the value of unconverted land, by creating a marketplace for preserved habitat, and through conservation easements
- Habitat fragmentation: identify critical areas through research and assess need for corridors, culverts, and/or underpasses
- Long-term habitat planning needed

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

- Increase education to general public on hunting techniques, animal welfare, respect of animals in environment
- Seasons and bag limits
- Encourage youth, possible youth bear day
- Hunting is THE management tool

Human-Bear Interactions

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

Value Statements Identified for 2011-2020

- Manage bear population to control damage
- Promote and protect “wild/natural” bear behavior via public education to ensure human safety
- Control bird feeders/trash/deer feeders-enforcement
- Support proper management of nuisance animals and Department decisions
- Give priority to protecting livelihoods as it relates to bear populations
- As we approach CCC, we must increase educational tools to inform people how to live with bears
- Manipulate, manage CCC to better match bear populations
- Promote bear safety
- Focus on prevention rather than reaction to bear problems