



MAINE DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE



BEAR FACTS

Black Bears Are Thriving in Maine

- Maine has the largest black bear population in the eastern U.S. and one of the largest in the U.S.
- There are more than 30,000 bears in Maine.
- Bears are less common along Maine's southern coast where human densities are the greatest, as a result, conflicts between people and bears are lower than other northeastern States.
- IFW receives an average of 500 nuisance bear complaints each year.
- Maine's bear population is increasing following years of low harvest and high cub production from 18,000 bears in 1990 to 30,000 bears in 2010.

Maine Has a "State of the Art" Bear Management Program

- Maine has one of the most comprehensive and extensive bear studies in North America and is based on wildlife management's proven scientific methods.
- Since 1975, between 80 and 100 radio-collared bears are tracked annually to provide information on bear survival and birth rates, behavior, and animal condition.
- IFW uses this information to adjust the bear harvest to meet bear population objectives and ensure the conservation of Maine's black bears.

Public Input Determines Black Bear Management Objectives

- In 1999, a public working group representing landowners, forest industry, sportsmen, and environmentalists developed the following management objectives through 2015:
 1. Stabilize the bear population through annual hunting and trapping harvests.
 2. Promote traditional hunting and trapping methods.
 3. Promote public tolerance of bears in Maine.

Regulated Hunting is the Primary Tool to Achieve Publics' Goals and Objectives

- Most states permit the use of bait, hound, or traps to harvest a black bear.
- To achieve population objectives, a harvest of 3,500 to 4,500 bears is needed annually.
- Since 2005, harvest has declined below objectives (average of 2,910 bears annually) and is attributed to a 24% decline in hunter numbers.
- Bait, hounds, and trapping accounts for 93% of the annual bear harvest:

Bait	79%	Still-hunting while deer hunting	4%
Hounds	11%	Unreported (likely still-hunting)	3%
Trapping	3%		

- Although hunting bears with bait is the most effective way to hunt bears in Maine, all the methods are needed to manage bear numbers.
- About 30% of bear hunters using bait and hounds, 19% of trappers, and 3% of still-hunter will harvest a bear each year.
- Although still-hunters in the western U.S. have greater success, restricting hunters in Maine to still-hunting may be impractical because of our terrain and thick vegetation.
- Without all the hunting methods, Maine's bear population will grow even more and conflicts between bears and people will become more common.

MAINE'S BLACK BEAR



Maine's black bear, an iconic symbol of Maine's forests, is one of the state's wildlife success stories. Once relegated to no more than a nuisance, the black bear has risen in stature to one of Maine's prized animals. Today, the expansive forest of northern, eastern, and western Maine supports one of the largest black bear populations in the United States.

Maine's bear population is valued not only by hunters, but others who enjoy watching wildlife and enjoy Maine's wildlife diversity. On the other hand, conflicts with people and bears do occur and if bears become too abundant, that is not good for people or the bears. IFW strives to balance these needs and makes management decisions based upon science gathered from monitoring Maine's bear population, bear harvest and conflicts.

Maine's black bear population is closely monitored by Department biologists through one of the most extensive, longest running biological studies in the U.S. The study began in 1975, and continues today. Over the last 38 years, Department biologists have captured and tracked more than 3,000 bears to determine the health and condition of Maine's bears and estimate how many cubs are born each year.

Since 2004, Maine's bear population has increased and is estimated at more than 30,000 animals. Hunting is the Department's primary tool for managing this thriving bear population. To control Maine's bear population, a variety of traditional hunting methods are offered to hunters in Maine including hounding, trapping, baiting and still-hunting/stalking.

More than 90 percent of the bear kill each year is by baiting, hounding and trapping; still-hunting/stalking accounts for less than 10% of the harvest. However, even with ample opportunity, success rates remain in favor of the bear, where on average 26% of hunters using bait and hounds and 20% using traps actually harvest a black bear. Hunters who use still hunting or stalking techniques to harvest black bears have the lowest success rates (<3%), due in a large part to Maine's dense forests.

Since 2005, the number of bears harvested each year has been below objectives leading to an increase in the bear population. Maine's bear population has grown from 23,000 black bears in 2004 to more than 30,000 black bears in 2010. Since bears are more common where human densities are lowest, the number of conflicts between humans and black bears in Maine is lower than other northeastern states and averages about 500 complaints each year. However, if Maine's bear population continues to grow, bears will move into areas with higher human densities and conflicts will rise.

Maine's black bears are highly valued by outdoor enthusiasts and the general public. The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife understands a healthy, well-managed bear population provides opportunities for everyone to enjoy Maine's black bears. IFW biologists set management goals with public input through the Department's strategic planning process. Hunters in Maine are provided a variety of traditional hunting methods to meet these goals and ensure Maine's bear population continues to thrive without increasing conflicts in backyards and neighborhoods.