

FLORIDA — Jimmy McDaniel, Game and Freshwater Fish Commission.

The status of the black bear in Florida is so precarious that the species was recently added to Florida's threatened wildlife list which will become effective July 1, 1974.

Areas in Florida which support and maintain a good bear population have special bear hunts. Due to these hunts, public interest remains high in support of bear habitat and management.

Although throughout the state there are remnants of bear populations along rivers, swamps and coastal hammocks, these isolated populations never increase because of lack of available habitat and human disturbance. There is also habitat available in which bear populations could exist but they are "killed—out" due to a philosophy that rural communities have handed down by their ancestors that "the only good bear, is a dead bear"; this idea probably originated during the pioneer days when crops and stock were destroyed by bears.

It is estimated that less than 300 bears remain in Florida. A total of approximately 25 bears are killed in these open areas annually.

The current bear research in Florida includes testing telemetry equipment and collecting biological data. The state is now prepared to start a detailed life history study.

Management consists of retaining large tracts of timber, bays and cypress swamps, and interspersed controlled burns on a three—to—five— year rotation in the flatwoods.