

FAQs

Draft Black Bear Management Plan

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Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission

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What is the draft Black Bear Management Plan?

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) developed the draft Black Bear Management Plan to provide a statewide framework for conserving Florida black bears and involving local stakeholders in helping FWC make regional bear management decisions.

How are black bears doing in Florida?

After dwindling to as few as 300 bears in the 1970s, the Florida black bear population has rebounded to an estimated 3,000 bears today. Bears roam forests and swamps from Eglin Air Force Base in the Panhandle to Ocala National Forest in the state's midsection to Big Cypress National Preserve in Southwest Florida.

What is the status of the Florida black bear?

In September 2010, the FWC approved new rules regarding how fish and wildlife are evaluated to determine if they are at a high risk of extinction. Following the new procedures, a Biological Status Review team evaluated the best available data on the Florida black bear and determined that the bear did not meet the criteria to be listed as State Threatened. That preliminary report was sent to five independent peer reviewers, who agreed with the report. The final recommendation was to remove the bear from the State Threatened Species list, and the Commission approved that recommendation in June 2011. However, bears will not be removed from the list until the Commission approves a bear management plan.

What is the goal of the draft Black Bear Management Plan?

The goal of the draft plan is to maintain sustainable black bear populations in suitable habitats throughout Florida for the benefit of the species and people. The plan includes management tasks to ensure the Florida black bear population will be maintained and never again be at a high risk of extinction.

Why was the draft plan created?

The draft plan sets a strategy in place to ensure bears never again will be at a high risk of extinction. As stewards of wildlife in Florida, the FWC must anticipate the needs of bears and balance them with the needs of people.

What are the objectives of the draft plan?

- Manage for a sustainable bear population statewide.
- Conserve enough suitable habitat to support bear populations where they presently exist, and promote connectivity between those populations.
- Increase public understanding of bears, support for bear conservation, and a willingness to coexist with bears.

- Reduce human-bear conflicts.

Will the bear be taken off the list of State Threatened Species before the management plan is approved?

No. FWC rules require that the management plan be approved before a species can be removed from the list.

What does the rule proposed in the draft Black Bear Management Plan do?

The rule proposed in the draft Black Bear Management Plan would make it unlawful to injure or kill bears. The rule also states the FWC will continue to engage with landowners and regulating agencies to guide future land use to be compatible with the objectives of the draft Black Bear Management Plan.

Under the draft plan, will the hunting of bears be allowed?

The plan does not propose a bear hunt. The plan acknowledges bear hunting is a complex issue and needs to incorporate a wider array of stakeholder involvement if hunting is to be considered as part of Florida's bear management program.

When will the Black Bear Management Plan go into effect?

At their February 2012 meeting, the Commissioners decided to move forward on the draft bear management plan and proposed bear rule. They instructed staff to revise and improve the plan based on ideas from private citizens and stakeholders. Final action on the draft plan and proposed rule is scheduled to occur at the June 2012 Commission meeting. Only then will the plan go into effect.

How does the draft Black Bear Management Plan address threats to the Florida black bear population?

Seven bear management units (BMUs) would be created to better align the aims and actions of management with the unique characteristics in each bear population range. The draft recommends forming "black bear assistance groups," composed of local stakeholders within each BMU, to work with FWC to help manage bears. Each unit contains a separate bear population that varies in size - from about 1,000 bears in the Central BMU, which includes Ocala National Forest, to about 20 bears in the Big Bend BMU, which includes Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge.

How many public comments were received on the draft Black Bear Management Plan and what will be done with them?

FWC collected about 500 comments on the draft plan via mail, email, online, and from four public workshops held around the state. A workshop was held in Bristol on Nov. 22, Naples on Nov. 29, Deland on Dec. 6, and Gainesville on Dec. 13, 2011. FWC also received more than 2,000 form letters via email about the plan. Staff recommended agency action on almost 70 percent of the comments to improve the plan at the February 2012 Commission meeting. Commissioners considered both staff recommendations and public testimony and directed staff to revise the plan and bring it back for their consideration in June 2012.