



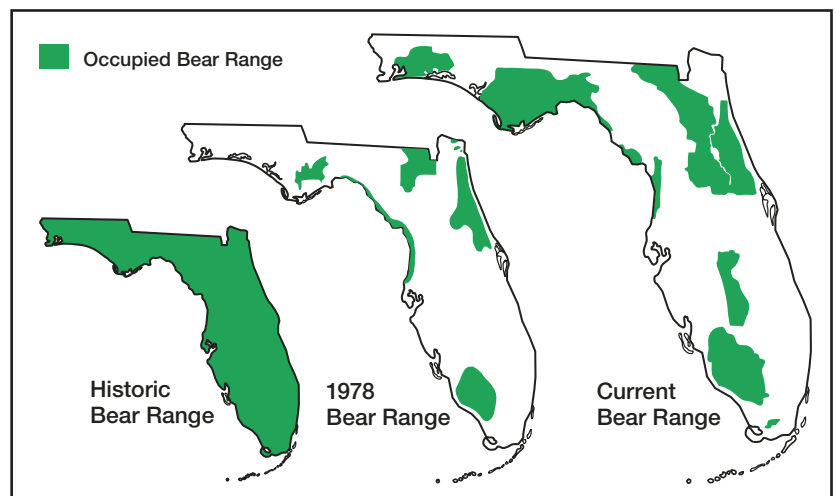
Florida Black Bear

Warning! Bear crossing. The biggest immediate danger to a Florida black bear is crossing a road. You may notice bear crossing signs on the roads in Florida are near where lots of bears live. There is a good reason to be watchful and slow down when driving in those areas, especially at dawn and dusk when bears are more active. Cars and trucks colliding with bears is the major cause of known bear deaths in the state. In 2010, 146 bears were killed by vehicles in Florida.

The bicyclist and the bear. It is rare but it happens – a bear just bumps into someone. In July 2011, a man riding his bike to work at Tyndall Air Force Base in the Panhandle was knocked over by a bear of about 300 pounds crossing the road. The black bear was running across the highway and crashed by accident into the bicyclist. The man suffered minor injuries and the bike's rear wheel was damaged. The bear just kept on going into the nearby woods.

Hey bear, your hair gives your identity away. OK, you know bears are hairy. That's pretty obvious. What you may not know is that the hair on each individual bear is different. Bear biologists at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission are able to analyze the DNA from roots of collected bear hair and identify specific bears. To get the sample tufts of hair, the biologists set up bait stations using doughnuts. Bears must cross over or under barbed wire to get the doughnuts and are, of course, unaware their DNA is captured as barbed wire snags their hair. The DNA analysis of bear hair is allowing biologists to more accurately count the number of bears in Florida, now estimated to be about 3,000.

Bear conservation. Loss of large forested lands and swamps is the biggest challenge to long-term conservation of the Florida black bear; especially in a growing state of nearly 19 million people soon to be the third most populated state in the nation. A male Florida black bear's range is about 60,000 acres and females range 15,000 acres. The conservation of key wildlife habitats has allowed bear populations room to expand their range, growing from just 300 bears in the 1970s to about 3,000 today. Large tracts of public lands, coupled with private



landowners whose management practices are good for wildlife, have made a huge difference for bears. Today the largest populations of bears are concentrated in the Panhandle, northeast Florida and southwest Florida with a few smaller groups in other areas. Bottom line is that the bear's biggest friend is you and others who care about bears. By learning about bears and sharing your knowledge with others, you can help conserve the Florida black bear so it continues striding across the state for generations to come.