



Maryland Black Bears: An Open Season for Trophy Hunting is Not Warranted

Current Bear Hunting Status

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) estimates that there are 326 bears in western Maryland. Despite the small population, trophy hunters have been pushing to put these animals in their sights for the last several administrations. For 50 years black bears were a protected species, even though the DNR retained the authority to have a hunt. However, in 2004, the DNR, with Governor Ehrlich's approval, moved to allow a trophy hunt on black bears for the first time since 1953, without scientific justification – under the guise that it was for nuisance bear control and population control. This was rejected by the General Assembly's Joint Committee on Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review by a vote of 12-7, though Governor Ehrlich moved forward with the trophy hunt anyway.

Who Opposes a Hunt?

Gonzales Research & Marketing Strategies completed a survey of Maryland voters revealing strong opposition to the state's first bear hunt in more than 50 years. Voters from all political parties as well as voters in diverse geographical regions, including Western Maryland where a majority of bears live, **oppose** the hunting of bears, prefer non-lethal methods to address bear conflicts, and would be less likely to vote for a politician who supports bear hunting.

The survey of 847 registered Maryland voters, conducted in 2004, revealed the following:

- Statewide, 35% say they favor the bear hunt, while **57% oppose it**. Democrats oppose the hunt 63% to 29% and Republicans oppose the hunt 48% to 47%. **In Western Maryland**, 47% support the bear hunt, while **49% oppose it**.
- **An overwhelming 73% of Marylanders would prefer that state officials address bear conflicts using non-lethal measures** such as public education, trash management, and rubber pellets and loud noises to frighten bears away, rather than hunting. In Western Maryland, 55% prefer non-lethal methods, while only 36% prefer hunting.
- When told that two animal protection groups have offered the state \$75,000 to reimburse farmers for any losses caused by bears and to augment educational programs to resolve bear conflicts, **59% of Maryland voters say the state should accept the money and cancel the bear hunt, while only 26% say the offer should be rejected**.

- Three times as many voters say they will penalize political candidates who support allowing the hunting and killing of black bears. In all regions and political parties, voters are less likely to vote for a politician who supports bear hunting.

A Hunting Season Encourages Poaching and the Illegal Trade in Bear Parts

- ❖ Black bears nationwide continue to be poached for their gallbladders, paws, and other parts, which are illegally traded for use in the traditional medicinal products of some cultures. Bear parts are sold on the black market for thousands of dollars.
- ❖ Another legal black bear hunting season in Maryland would attract poachers to the state, would make it more difficult to enforce poaching regulations, and would increase the likelihood that bears here will be killed illegally for profit.

Comments from Trophy Hunters in their Own Words

From The Washington Post, October 26, 2004, on the first bear hunt:

“Ciekot...said he noticed the bear’s small size but knew that Maryland regulations do not require that bears under a certain size be spared. ‘I knew it wasn’t very big,’ he said. ‘I was shooting whatever came through.’ Ciekot said the bear nearly got away: He spooked it by moving his Winchester .270-caliber rifle, and it ran off about 40 yards. Then, Ciekot said, the bear turned around and looked at him, seemingly unsure whether the hunter was a threat...Instead, it stopped, and Ciekot shot it through the chest. The bear ran a short way and then collapsed, Ciekot said.”

“The second bear killed was a roughly 140-pound male shot by retired Internal Revenue Service agent Sheridan Green. Green said he spotted the bear in an acorn-strewn stand of oaks near the Potomac River and fired from about 100 yards away. ‘It’s a once-in-a-lifetime deal for me,’ said Green, 59, of Oakland. He said he had been prompted to apply for a bear permit by his wife, who wanted a bearskin rug.”

Proponents of Bear Hunting Cannot Link a Hunt to Bear Nuisance Complaints

Both neighboring West Virginia and Pennsylvania have season for killing bears – and their nuisance complaints are staggering. The fact is that hunting is not a solution to dealing with individual, nuisance bears just as shooting into a crowd is not a solution to crime. Hunting is scattershot and only affects random bears – it does nothing to target any problems but rather encourage removal of larger, more stable bears in the population since hunters are seeking trophies. **Citizens and the DNR already have the authority to target any specific bears that cause damage or that are threatening to people crops or property.**

Proven Humane Methods are Most Effective in Solving Bear/Human Conflicts

People living in black bear habitat around the country have developed many creative solutions with which to prevent or resolve human-bear conflicts – humanely. Conversely, a black bear hunt would result in mortality of a random sample of bears, and would not target those individual bears responsible for damage. In fact, by killing a bear that is not causing problems, hunters may open the door for another bear—potentially one more likely to cause problems—to move into the vacated territory.

STOP THE ALLURE

- ❖ Bear-proof trash cans and food storage lockers have been an enormous help across the country. Once bears are unsuccessful at accessing a food source they will move on.
- ❖ By keeping well-mown “buffer zones” around beehives, crops, and livestock holding areas, farmers reduce natural cover for bears. Without cover bears are typically discouraged from approaching a farm. When this is not feasible electric fencing, even used temporarily, can be highly effective.

AVERSIVE CONDITIONING

- ❖ Crop damage and unwanted trespassing by bears can be prevented through aversive conditioning. This method works by making an experience disagreeable enough to the bear (through assertive behavior by humans, pyrotechnic assaults, and rubber buckshot) that it is discouraged from repeating the undesirable behavior.
- ❖ The use of guarding animals to protect livestock from predators is gaining in popularity around the country and has proven highly effective. For protection of livestock against black bears, in particular, guard dogs appear to be most effective.

RELOCATION/EUTHANASIA

- ❖ In those rare cases in which the above methods fail to alter the behavior of a given bear, the DNR may trap and relocate the animal or, as a last resort, may euthanize the bear.
- ❖ Hunting bears for recreation is not an effective means of solving bear/human conflicts, and may actually exacerbate these conflicts. Hunters tend to take adult male bears, skewing the population in favor of younger sub-adult males who will be able to expand their range and fill the vacancies left by the adults. Cubs are likely to seek out alternative food sources in homes, campsites, and dumpsters, than older established males.

Why People See Bears

Of the 1,782 bear complaints received by the Maryland DNR from 1997-2000, more than two thirds were bears in trash (39%), bear sightings (19%), or bears in birdfeeders (10%).

The black bear’s uncanny sense of smell is used for finding the fruits, nuts, plants, and insect larvae that they like to eat. This however, also makes them aware of other food such as trash, bird food and grills – three common bear attractants. Black bears are timid animals, who generally prefer to keep to themselves and far away from people. However, if these scents are present they will look to see if there is a food source. Once acclimated to that easy source, they will continue to come back to the attractant. Thankfully, this behavior is easily modified and most bears can learn fear of human and human habitat quickly. For those bears who do not, the DNR may lawfully relocate or euthanize.

Black bears prefer large forested areas, mainly Garrett County. Bears are also found in limited numbers in the forests of Allegany, Washington, and Frederick Counties. Occasionally, a wandering young bear will find his way into metropolitan areas. *A black bear hunting season is neither effective as a way to control “problem” bears, nor necessary to manage the population of black bears in Maryland.*