

## **Black Bear**

### Natural History

Black bears in Arizona are found in a variety of habitats, including subalpine and montane conifer forests, riparian forests, evergreen woodlands, and chaparral. An interesting footnote to black bear distribution in the state is the absence of any sizeable population of black bears north of the Colorado River.

Cubs are born in winter dens during January, usually in pairs, but larger litters are not uncommon. Cubs weigh only six to 12 ounces at birth and are helpless, but they grow and develop rapidly, emerging from the den with their mother in April. The mother stays with her cubs through the first summer and fall, and dens with them again the following winter. Female black bears in Arizona usually reach reproductive age in their fourth year, and generally breed every other year. Normal reproductive cycles in Arizona black bears may be adversely affected by drought, and/or poor physiological condition. Adult males weigh up to 350 pounds and adult females up to 250 pounds. Black bears are relatively long-lived animals, with some individuals exceeding 20 years of age. The statewide population is estimated at 2,500 bears.

Black bears are normally shy, secretive animals displaying high levels of intelligence and exploratory behavior. Although bears are generally most active in the early morning and late evening; they may alter their activity pattern to exploit sources of artificial food, becoming nocturnal at campgrounds and dump-sites. Nuisance activities are nearly always associated with artificial food sources (beehives, campgrounds, and livestock).

Bears are usually solitary animals; the exceptions are family groups (mother and cubs), breeding pairs, and congregations at feeding sites. Both adults and sub-adults are known to move long distances (100 miles) to exploit isolated pockets of food. The mobility of black bears sometimes leads them to appear in uncharacteristic habitats and to return from long distances after being moved. Most Arizona black bears hibernate from November through March, during which time they reduce their body temperature, heart rate, and metabolic function, while still remaining somewhat conscious in the den.

### Hunt History

Bear hunting has a long history in Arizona. As late as 1928, bears were classified as predatory animals and could be shot or trapped at any time. In 1929, however, a new "game code" classified bears of all kinds as big game, provided a month-long open season, and prescribed a bag limit of one. Bears could not be trapped, but they could be taken with dogs. Later years were even more restrictive; cubs were protected in 1934; in 1936, the bear season was closed south of the Gila River.

The status of bears deteriorated drastically during World War II. In 1942 all of the state's refuges were open to bear hunting and the season was reopened in Cochise and Graham counties at the request of stockmen. In 1944, month-long fall and spring hunts were authorized. The following year, bears lost their designation as game animals, and in 1949 a year-long season was authorized for Apache, Greenlee, Graham, and eastern Coconino counties, except during the

seasons for other big-game species. After reinstating spring and fall bear seasons in 1950, the Arizona Game and Fish Commission again opted for year-long seasons from 1951 to 1953.

After 1954, bear regulations became more restrictive, tags were required to take one, and in 1968 the black bear was again classified as big game. This designation was appropriate as hunter interest in the species was increasing. Hunt success varied with weather conditions and population vagaries, but annual bear harvests ranged from 131 to 313 for the years 1964 through 1980. Relatively few bears were taken under the stock-taking clause, most of them being taken by sport hunters. Concern about the bear's relatively low reproductive rate caused the Department to monitor the bear harvest more closely. Accordingly, mandatory checkout procedures were initiated in 1980. Other recent changes in regulations have included the authorization of a permit-only spring season in select units, the elimination of bear-baiting as a method of take, and unit harvest objectives in which the season is closed after a certain number of female bears are taken.

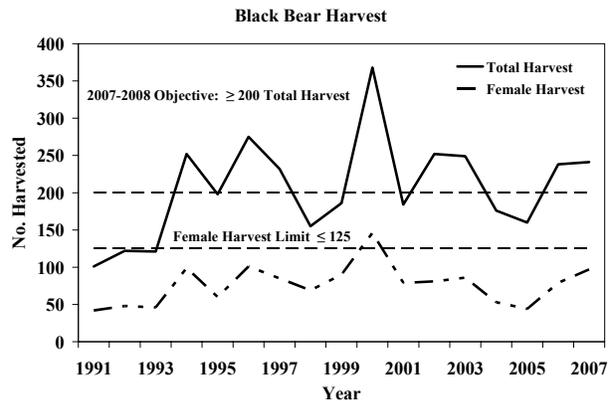
### Management Needs

### Research Needs

### Black Bear Operational Approaches

Below are approaches for guiding the management of Arizona Game Species. In all the approaches listed below, annual harvest objectives were derived from past harvest estimates and recent habitat conditions. In all cases, these harvest objectives are well within the range of sustainable harvest.

1. Maintain an annual harvest of no more than 125 female bears (including depredation take), with a total harvest of 200 or more bears (including males). Use harvest age and sex data in combination with conservation genetic analysis to assure that populations remain at sustainable levels as described in the conservation strategy (1.A.1-1.A.6, 1.B.1-1.B.3).
2. Provide recreational opportunity for 4,000 or more hunters per year (1.B.1-1.B.3).
3. Maintain existing occupied habitat, with emphasis on retention of medium and high quality habitat. Maintain connectivity bear habitats (1.A.1-1.B.6).
4. Human-wildlife conflicts will be managed according to Department Policy (DOM II.10) (2.A.1-2.A.6); hunter opportunity will be the preferred method to mitigate conflicts.
5. Maintain a complete database from all harvest sources through a mandatory check-out system, including age, sex, kill location, etc., to develop population trend information (1.A.1-1.A.6).



6. Identify important habitats for bear populations and ensure protection and improvement, where possible, through cooperation with land management agencies and landowners; manage from a landscape perspective (1.A.1-1.A.6, 2.D.1-2.D.3).
7. Implement hunt structures to direct harvest emphasis toward the male segment of the bear population (1.A.1-1.A.6).
8. Implement hunt structures to direct harvest emphasis towards areas with high bear populations and where depredation and nuisance complaints are substantiated (1.A.1-1.A.6, 1.B.6-1.B.9).
9. Develop bear hunt recommendations and population monitoring as described in the Department's conservation strategies for black bear (1.A.1-1.A.6).
10. Cooperate with land management agencies to reduce conflicts between bears and humans, and increase public awareness of bears and their habitat, to reduce nuisance problems (2.A.1-2.A.6, 2.D.1-2.D.3).