

Proposed Black Bear Baiting Rule Change

BACKGROUND:

Current Idaho black bear hunting regulations allow the use of non-natural baits including processed foods, domestic animal feed, dead livestock, and other human-edible products (collectively described as non-natural baits). Bears that eat non-natural baits can become food-conditioned and will seek out other non-natural sources. Food-conditioned bears typically become nuisance bears, and nuisance bears may cause significant damage to private property. Further, nuisance bears are a public safety concern and are an expensive liability to state and federal agencies. Management of nuisance bears often necessitates the lethal removal of bears involved in conflicts. Requiring black bear hunters to use only natural baits in occupied grizzly bear habitat will reduce the risk of creating more conflict bears as a result of food-conditioning to processed foods and other human-related food products or garbage.

This rule is intended to address a public safety concern by reducing the potential for food conditioning and creation of nuisance bears in occupied grizzly bear habitat where it is currently legal to use bait to hunt black bears. Game Management Units in which natural bait would be required would be specified by Fish and Game Commission proclamation. The rule is expected to apply to game management unit 60, the western 1/3 of unit 61, and in that portion of game management unit 65 east of state highway 33. In 2008 the USDA Forest Service Caribou-Targhee National Forest implemented a new Special Order on Food Storage and Sanitation (Order No. 04.15.0063) on that portion of the National Forest in these game management units that requires forest users to properly store their food and refuse with the primary goal of minimizing grizzly bear/human encounters.

Bear hunters would be required to use unprocessed, natural baits in the specified units. Natural bait is defined as naturally occurring plant foods (for example, roots, berries), the parts of unprotected or predatory wildlife, nongame fish, or accidentally killed wildlife salvaged in accordance with IDAPA 13.01.10, "Rules Governing the Importation, Possession, Release, Sale or Salvage of Wildlife," Subsections 300.02.c. and 300.02.d, or inedible parts of game animals or game fish legally obtained. Privately-produced honey would not be considered to be "natural bait" for purposes of this rule.

This rule is anticipated to affect approximately 50 individuals who purchase black bear bait site tags within the affected area. Failure to use natural bait in the specified units would be a misdemeanor violation. It is not the intent of this proposed rule to modify the restrictions on baiting in those areas where baiting is currently prohibited.