Idaho
Black Bear Management Plan
2025 – 2030

Prepared by **IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Black bears (*Ursus americanus*) are a valuable big game species in Idaho. Idaho offers generous black bear hunting opportunities throughout the state, including hunting with hounds and the use of bait. Because of Idaho's diverse landscapes, black bear populations remain robust even with ample harvest opportunities. Many residents and visitors alike enjoy seeing black bears across the state. However, black bears are also predators of Idaho's ungulate species and cause conflicts with humans through livestock depredations and safety concerns. Because of this, black bear management in Idaho is complex and must consider many factors.

The 2025–2030 Idaho Black Bear Management Plan is intended to provide specific information, tools, and direction for managing black bears in Idaho. It includes actionable strategies for improved population monitoring, conflict response, and communication with hunters and the general public. This plan updates information from the 1999–2010 Black Bear Management Plan. Since that time, black bear management in Idaho has become more complex as both Idaho's human population and bear-human conflicts have grown, grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos*) populations continue to expand, statewide black bear harvest has increased, and new methods of monitoring are in development.

This plan revision included a thorough review of current, pertinent research on black bear monitoring, conflict management, and predation. Staff compiled recent data on harvest, human conflicts, and depredations. A hunter survey was conducted to assess hunter experiences, satisfaction, and preferences for black bear management (Appendix 1).

Information from these sources was used to identify priorities for the next 6 years at both statewide and regional levels. A review of harvest metrics from the 1999–2010 plan suggested that additional metrics would better inform future management decisions, so this plan incorporates new criteria that better describe trends over time. This plan identifies specific goals for developing additional tools for both population and harvest monitoring, such as evaluating mandatory harvest reporting for black bear hunters and exploring camera trapping for assessing black bear populations. The black bear hunter survey indicated some interest in managing for different types of black bear hunting opportunities, so this plan includes strategies to better understand hunter desires. Finally, this plan prioritizes implementing a new conflict reporting database and improving public outreach and communications about bear conflicts, bear identification, and human safety.

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INTRODUCTION

Black bears occur throughout many of Idaho's habitats and inhabit all of Idaho Department of Fish and Game's (IDFG or the Department) administrative regions. They have been classified as big game animals since 1943, and the diversity of hunting opportunities has steadily increased through time, to include use of bait and hounds beginning in the 1970s. Black Bear harvest has increased steadily through time and black bear tags are the third most popular big game tag purchased in Idaho, after deer and elk.

However, black bear management is complex and extends beyond hunting and harvest management. Black bears have high nonconsumptive value and are a popular species for both visitors and residents to observe and photograph. They can also cause conflicts with both livestock and humans. Overall, Idaho black bear management needs to balance a host of competing needs and interests.

PURPOSE OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

IDFG's mission states that all wildlife in the state of Idaho is the property of the state and shall be preserved, protected, perpetuated, and managed. The Department provides further direction for implementing its mission in an annual strategic plan, which includes direction to sustain Idaho's fish and wildlife and the habitats upon which they depend and meet the demand for hunting, fishing, trapping and other wildlife recreation, among other goals.

The 2025-2030 Black Bear Management Plan is intended to provide specific information, tools, and direction for meeting those goals for black bear management in Idaho. In general, the purpose of the 2025-2030 Idaho Black Bear Management Plan is to:

- Provide direction and tools for IDFG staff to sustainably manage black bears in Idaho.
- Assist the Idaho Fish and Game Commission with decision-making and direction for black bear management.
- Provide transparency regarding IDFG management goals for black bears, and strategies to achieve those goals
- Provide information for others, including state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and hunting groups to enable them to be engaged in black bear management.

Prior to this plan, the most recent Idaho black bear management plan was completed in 1999 and was intended to guide management for 10 years. Since that time, Idaho's human, hunter, and bear population characteristics have changed markedly. Statewide black bear harvest has increased, from an average of just over 2,300 bears annually between 2001-2005 to an average of over 3,300 bears annually between 2018-2022. Idaho's human population grew more than 42% between the 2000 and 2020 U.S. censuses, from about 1.3 million to over 1.8 million. Increases in bear-human conflicts in some parts of the state have led to changes in management structure and conflicts among constituencies. Grizzly bear populations are increasing and expanding and therefore pose new challenges to black bear management in some parts of the state. New methods of monitoring are available or in development, which may provide additional insights into Idaho's black bear population.

This plan reflects these changes and is designed to offer guidance to IDFG to support black bear conservation and management across the state over the next 6 years (2025-2030). A hunter opinion survey was completed to better understand black bear hunter harvest patterns and preferences, and to help inform this planning process (Appendix 1). This survey process provided the planning team with information regarding current hunter characteristics, satisfaction, and desires. This plan incorporates the results of this survey along with recent bear harvest, population, predation, and conflict information to provide overall direction to IDFG staff, identify both regional and statewide population and management objectives, and support evaluation of potential regulation changes.

RESULTS FROM PREVIOUS PLANNING PERIOD

Several of the goals articulated in the 1999-2010 Black Bear Management Plan involved establishing and using harvest objectives to manage bears and hunting opportunity at the Data Analysis Unit (DAU) level. That plan used 3 harvest level descriptors (light, moderate, and heavy) to describe current and desired harvest goals for each DAU. These descriptors and goals were based on historical harvest data, information on conflicts and depredations, and available habitat information. For the past 2 decades, biologists have been able to compare observed annual harvest characteristics to criteria established in the plan when developing season and rule proposals.

One challenge of black bear management is obtaining adequate population data to inform decision making. Since the previous planning process, IDFG has continued working on efficient and reliable methods of estimating black bear population trends, densities, and abundances to supplement population metrics from harvest data. Staff in several IDFG regions conducted scent-station surveys along designated transects from approximately 2002-2010. However, it became apparent that in areas with low to moderate bear densities, these surveys provided insufficient data for determining densities and monitoring population trends. After scent stations were discontinued, some regions experimented with hair-snare sampling to obtain DNA for mark-recapture population estimates. Density estimates from hair-snares in the Southwest region—which included a mix of GMUs that spanned the entire range of hunting pressure descriptors —ranged from 0.62 bears/mi^2 to 1.03 bears/mi^2 between 2007-2010, underscoring that black bear densities are not uniform across the state and may be influenced by different management strategies.

Most recently, IDFG collaborated with the University of Idaho to evaluate the use of cameras in estimating black bear abundance in several GMUs. The resulting thesis (Nelson 2022) indicated that while use of cameras to estimate abundance is possible, there is work yet to be done to determine optimal camera density, distribution, and analyses for generating these estimates.

The Department has made progress toward better distributing black bear recreational opportunities by adding hunts in the Southeast Region, adjusting hunt structures in the Southwest Region to better balance conflict management and quality hunting opportunity, and extending seasons in GMUs throughout the state where harvest data indicated additional hunting was sustainable for populations.

Recently, IDFG has been testing a new conflict reporting system to improve tracking of human-bear conflicts. This system, called the Wildlife Conflict 2 (WC2) Database, will offer additional tools for communication of issues and responses as well as better means of tracking and mapping conflicts.

Overall, since development of the 1999-2010 plan, Idaho bear populations have remained robust even as harvest has increased. IDFG has explored new methods of monitoring populations, which will inform future efforts. We have improved our ability to monitor harvest, track conflicts, and provide additional harvest opportunities.

BLACK BEAR HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

HABITAT

Across Idaho and throughout North America, black bears are distributed across a diversity of habitat types, climate regimes, and forage classifications. However, the occurrence of black bears is mostly related to the distribution of forested areas (Hall 1981, Scheick and McGowen 2014). North of the Snake River Plain black bears are found throughout the forested mountains and sage-steppe foothills. South of the Snake River, however, few black bears occur except in the most southeastern corner of the State (Beecham and Rohlman 1994, Young and Beecham 1986). Bear harvest has steadily increased in the Southeast corner of the state over the past 20 years and may indicate that the bear population there is slowly increasing.

Short-term increases in black bear populations are commonly associated with annual increases in high quality nutrition (i.e., late summer and fall berry production), resulting in increased reproductive and survival rates. Several years of poor berry crops can result in reduced cub production and increased mortality of sub-adult black bears (Amstrup and Beecham 1976). Long-term population trends are directly related to longer-term changes in habitat quantity and quality. However, even in high quality habitats, other factors can influence a black bear population in a given year. For example, heavy hunting pressure can reduce a population below its biological carrying capacity (Beston and Mace 2012).

FOOD HABITS

Black bears are generalist and opportunistic foragers, allowing them to occupy a variety of habitats throughout their range (Pelton 2003). They are able to shift their diet to take advantage of the most nutritious and available foods based on geographic location and time of year.

Black bears primarily feed on grasses and forbs during spring and early summer. However, during peak ungulate parturition (late May through mid-June), black bears can be an important predator of neonatal elk and deer (Smith and Anderson 1996, Zager et al. 2003, Zager and Beecham 2006). By mid-July, they begin adding fruits such as huckleberry, wild cherry, buffaloberry, serviceberry, hawthorn, and mountain ash to their diet (Jacoby et al. 1999). Insects are an important food source for black bears and can aid in survival during years when other food sources fail (Beecham and Rohlman 1994). In Idaho, Beecham and Rohlman (1994) found that animal foods, such as deer and elk, made up less than 2% of black bear diets. However, other

studies suggest this percentage may fluctuate based on prey availability, densities, and carrying capacity of the system (Zager and Beecham 2006). Black bears will also opportunistically prey on livestock such as sheep, chickens, beehives and honey, and crops such as apples, grains, beans, and other human foods.

REPRODUCTION AND DENNING

Black bears have a low reproductive rate relative to many other large mammals, due to late reproductive maturity, small litter sizes, and high maternal investment. Breeding season for black bears occurs from mid-May to early August in Idaho. Age at first reproduction is largely dictated by female age and body size; generally, females begin to breed when they are 4-7 years of age and weigh over 100 pounds (Kasworm and Thier 1992, Beecham and Rohlman 1994). After their first litter, females generally reproduce every other year (Boone et al. 2003).

Black bears employ a strategy known as delayed implantation, where active embryo growth typically occurs 4-5 months after breeding, resulting in cub birth during the hibernation period in January-February. In Idaho, Beecham and Rohlman (1994) found the mean litter size for black bears to be 1.7. Overall population productivity (number of young produced per year) appears to be density-independent and a function of habitat quality and the number of adult females present in the population (Beecham 1980). After emerging from their den in early spring, young will stay with their sow until the following spring before dispersing to new habitat (Garshelis 1994).

Black bears hibernate during winter to conserve energy during a time of low food availability and low temperatures. In Idaho, black bears will enter dens from mid-October through November and emerge in mid-April to May (Beecham and Rohlman 1994). Timing of denning, entrance and emergence is driven by factors such as food availability, body condition, sex, age, reproductive status, and weather (Schwartz et al. 1987, Beecham and Rohlman 1994, Fowler et al 2019, Long et al. 2024). Late denning is often a result of poor body condition, with bears staying out of dens longer in an attempt to gain as much nutrition as possible before hibernation. A study in the Rocky Mountain National Park suggested that bears denning near human-use areas entered dens earlier and emerged later (Baldwin and Bender 2010). Denning habitat for black bears in Idaho is highly variable and includes excavated ground dens, rocks, hollow logs, and trees (Beecham et al. 1983).

POPULATION DYNAMICS

Black bears in Idaho are long-lived, with a lifespan of up to 30 years for both males and females. Adult males typically weigh between 250-280 pounds while females range between 120-140 pounds (Beecham and Rohlman 1994). Black bear populations are comprised of resident adults, cubs of resident females, and transient subadults. Vital rates, including survival and reproduction, are typically affected by a combination of population density, resources availability, intra- and interspecific competition, and human factors (Beston 2011). Population models for black bears suggests that survival of adult females is the most important demographic rate to population growth. However, low spatial and temporal variation in survival of adult females minimizes wildlife managers' ability to affect this vital rate.

Mortality rates for black bears are relatively high (20-30%) during the first year of life (Rogers 1977, Bunnel and Tait 1985, Kolenosky 1990) and primary sources of mortality include starvation, abandonment, and cannibalism. Annual mortality rates decrease to 15-25% when bears reach adulthood (Bunnel and Tait 1985). Human-caused sources of mortality (e.g., hunting, roadkill, and management removals) are the dominant causes of mortality for adult and sub-adult animals.

HEALTH AND DISEASE

Throughout their range, black bears are exposed to a variety of parasites and diseases. In the Western U.S, ecto- and endoparasites including intestinal worms, fleas, ticks, and mites account for the majority of the diseases experienced by black bears (Binninger et al 1980, Reichert et al 2024). The most prominent parasitic diseases in black bears are mange and trichinosis.

Mange is a disease caused by 3 mite species *(Demodex ursi*, *Ursicoptes americanus, and Sarcoptes scabiei*) which can induce hair loss and scabbing of the skin, reduce body condition, and promote secondary infections (Beecham and Rohlman 1994, Arlian et al. 2017, Peltier et al. 2018). Both *Demodex ursi* and *Ursicoptes americanus* affect the hair follicle and result in hair loss. *Sarcoptes scabiei,* sarcoptic mange, can lead to death from emaciation and secondary infections. Though sarcoptic mange primarily occurs in canids, reports in black bears have been increasing in portions of their range (Niedringhaus et al. 2019).

Trichinosis is another important parasitic disease of black bears. Black bears can ingest the roundworm parasite (*Trichinella spp.),* by consuming carrion or live prey that has encysted Trichinella larvae within its muscle tissue. If humans ingest infected bear meat, the trichinella parasite can be transferred to its new host through this same mechanism. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends meat be cooked to ≥165°F internal temperature to assure it is safe for human consumption (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2024). Research suggests that Trichinella presence in wild black bears is low in North America, ranging from 1-8% (Dubey et al. 2013, Dubey et al. 2016, Schad et al. 1986). However, 1 study found a 20% prevalence rate in Yukon, Canada (Harms et al. 2021).

Disease in black bears has rarely been found to drive population trends (Rogers 1983). Nonetheless, it will be important to document and monitor for new or increased prevalence of diseases to ensure the health and longevity of Idaho's black bear population.

HARVEST MANAGEMENT

BACKGROUND

Black bears have been classified as big game animals in Idaho since 1943. During the 1940s, bear hunting was open year-round throughout much of the state (except for 5 north Idaho counties) with a bag limit of 1 black bear per person per year. Throughout the 1950s and 60s, additional units within the state limited season length. Beginning in 1972, the use of dogs for bear hunting and harvest of sows accompanied by cubs (spring season only) were prohibited. Hunters were required to purchase tags for black bear while hunting in most of

Idaho's northern and central units beginning in 1973. Beginning in 1979, hunters were required to possess black bear tags for units across the state.

During the 1970s, bear seasons became increasingly unit specific. In 1975, hunters were allowed to harvest an extra bear in 3 north Idaho units. In 1976, 4 southwest Idaho units were closed to bear hunting. By 1977, additional southern Idaho units were closed to bear hunting while 2 bears were allowed in several north and central Idaho units. The use of dogs was permitted in most units throughout the state, except during deer and elk seasons, beginning in 1978. Regulations from 1979 indicate that baiting was illegal except by permission of the landowner during the period from September 1st through December 31st each year.

Three significant changes to black bear harvest management occurred in 1983. First, hunters were required to submit any harvested black bear to IDFG within 10 days of harvest for sex determination, pelt tagging, and tooth extraction and aging (IDAPA 13.01.08.420.02a). Second, take of females accompanied by cubs was prohibited year-round (IDAPA 13.01.08.300.01b). Finally, baiting regulations were expanded to include details about allowable containers and address proximity of bait placement to roads or trails (IDAPA 13.01.17.100).

Pursuit seasons (also known as Dog Training seasons, those seasons allowing the use of dogs to pursue, but not take black bears) were first added in 1984 to a limited number of units. In 1986, all remaining year-round and multiple bear hunting seasons were eliminated. Several southeast Idaho units were added to the list of units closed to black bear hunting. The first black bear controlled hunt was initiated in 1988 in a portion of Unit 32A. During the early 1990s, additional controlled hunts were added in units 1, 22, 31, and 32. In 2003, second tags became available again in some north and central Idaho units. Overall, black bear harvest management structure, including primarily general seasons, bait and hounds allowed in most units, and mandatory harvest reporting, has largely remained unchanged since the early 2000s.

Since the mid-1980s, black bear harvest has increased over 260%, from 1,029 in 1985 to 3,742 in 2022 (Figure 1). During the 1999-2010 planning period, annual harvest averaged 2,248 black bears. In comparison, black bear harvest from 2011-2022 averaged 2,849, an increase of approximately 27%. The Panhandle, Clearwater, and Southwest Regions comprise the majority of the total black bear harvest in Idaho (79% of total harvest 2015-2023; Figure 2). Besides harvest management framework, other factors that influence bear harvest include food availability, weather, hunter density, and access (Miller 1990, Kluge 2022, Jones et al. 2015).
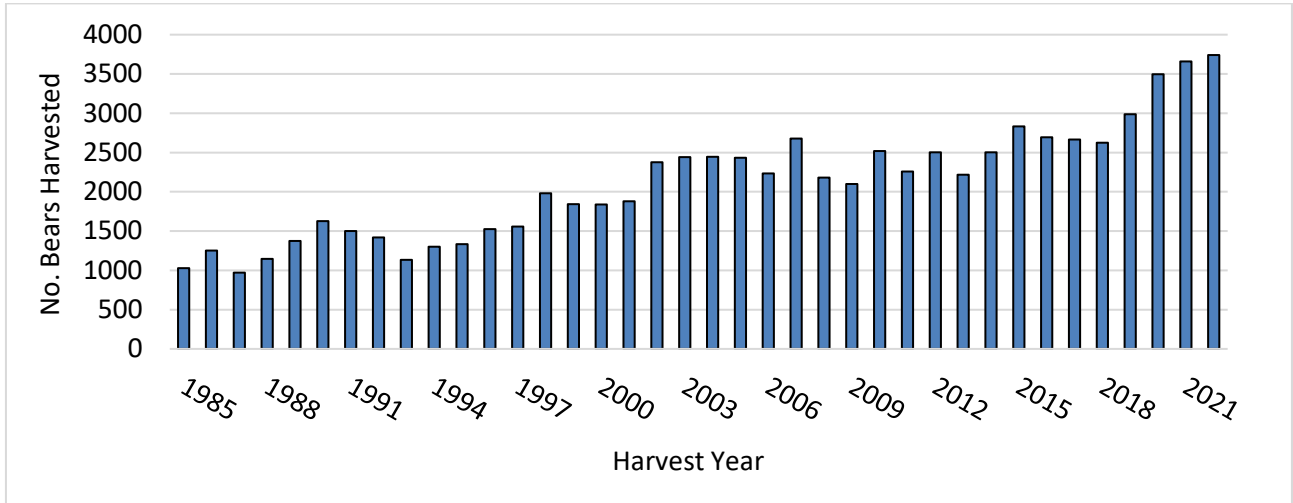
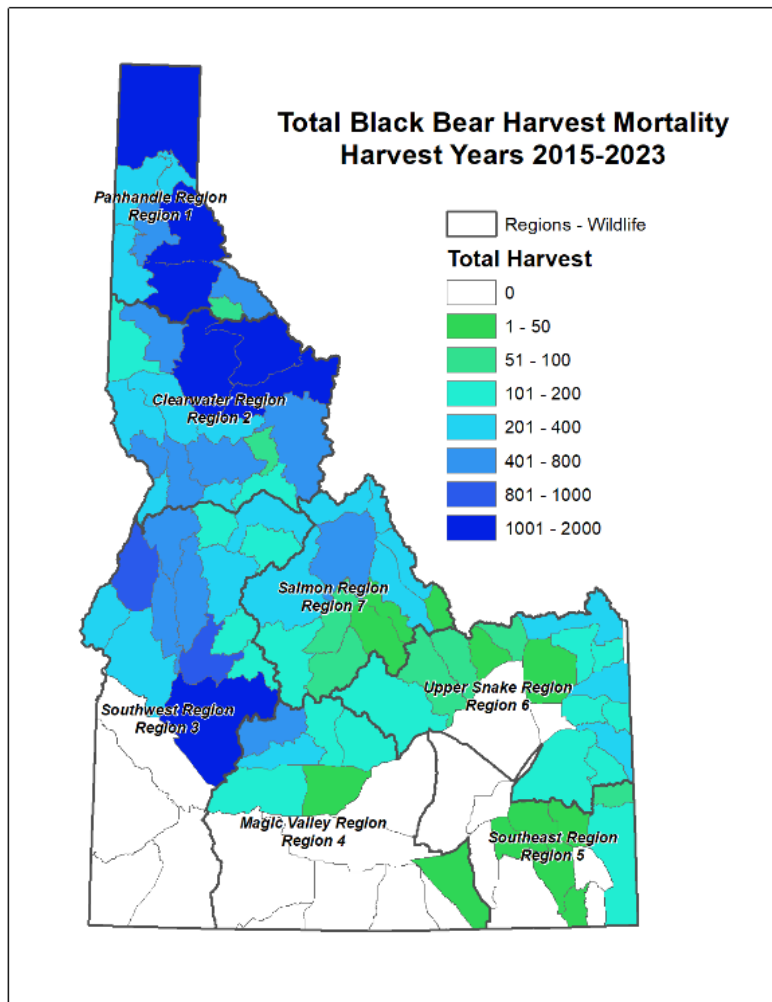**Figure 1.** Total documented black bear harvest from mandatory hunter reporting, 1985-2022.

Figure 2. Distribution of black bear harvest by Game Management Unit (GMU) in Idaho, 2015-2023.

2024 HARVEST CHARACTERISTICS

At the time of plan development (2024) IDFG manages black bears mostly using general fall and spring hunting seasons with a few controlled hunt opportunities. Hunters can purchase permits to pursue black bears with hounds or to use bait stations. Baiting is permitted for black bears throughout the majority of the state, with the exception of units 1, 62, 62A, 71, 72, 74, 75, 77, 78 and part of 61. Residents possessing a valid hunting license are able to use dogs for black bear hunting after the purchase of an over-the-counter hound hunter permit. No more than 70 nonresident hound hunter permits will be issued each year to nonresident hunters who are not licensed outfitters, with exceptions for the Lolo, Selway, and Middle Fork Elk Zones.

General spring black bear seasons open in early to mid-April and run until early summer, depending on GMU. Spring bear season is typically conducive to taking male bears because females with cubs are generally first to enter dens for hibernation and the last to emerge during spring, whereas males tend to have the shortest hibernation period and earliest emergence (Beecham and Rohlman 1994). In the fall, general seasons typically run from late August to October or November. In select GMUs, second tags are available to resident hunters and non-resident hunters can purchase a second tag at a reduced price. Nonresidents may also use their unfilled elk or deer tag to harvest a black bear if the black bear season overlaps the valid time and location of their elk or deer tag. Use of nonresident deer and elk tags on black bears comprises less than 5% of total nonresident bear harvest.

It is a requirement that all hunter-harvested and salvaged black bears be brought to an IDFG regional office or official checkpoint to fulfill mandatory check requirements. Mortality check-ins allow for the documentation of age, sex, hunter effort, and location of harvest or salvage information. Age is determined through extraction and subsequent aging analysis of a premolar tooth. Idaho hunters are not required to salvage meat from harvested black bears. IDFG does not currently conduct annual harvest surveys or require mandatory harvest reporting for unsuccessful black bear hunters. Because not all tag holders hunt for black bears, it is unclear how many hunters hunt actively hunt bears each year. Black bear tag holders may be surveyed in the future to better understand participation rates.

Since 2013, hunters deploying and using bait to hunt black bears account for most of the harvest (43.4%; Figure 3). Hunters pursuing black bears through still hunting or stalking comprised 26.9% of harvest, followed by pursuit dogs (hounds) at 14.3% of the harvest. Additionally, successful black bear hunters have reported harvesting bears incidentally (11%) and while using predator calls (0.2%). Hunting is the primary source of documented black-bear mortality. Non-harvest mortality (including natural mortality and roadkill) comprises <1% of the total documented mortality.

Hunters harvested similar numbers of bears during spring and fall seasons throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s. Beginning in the late 2000s, spring harvest began to exceed fall harvest statewide. Average fall and spring black bear harvest was 1,196 and 2,484, respectively, from 2020-2022 (Figure 4).
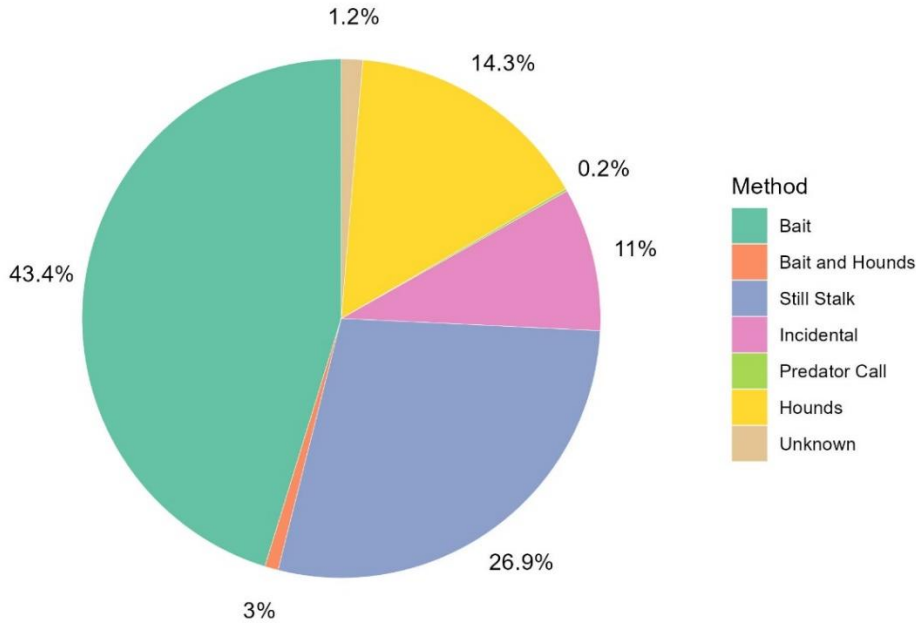
Figure 3. Percentage of statewide black bear harvest by method of take from mandatory harvest reporting in Idaho, 2014–2023.
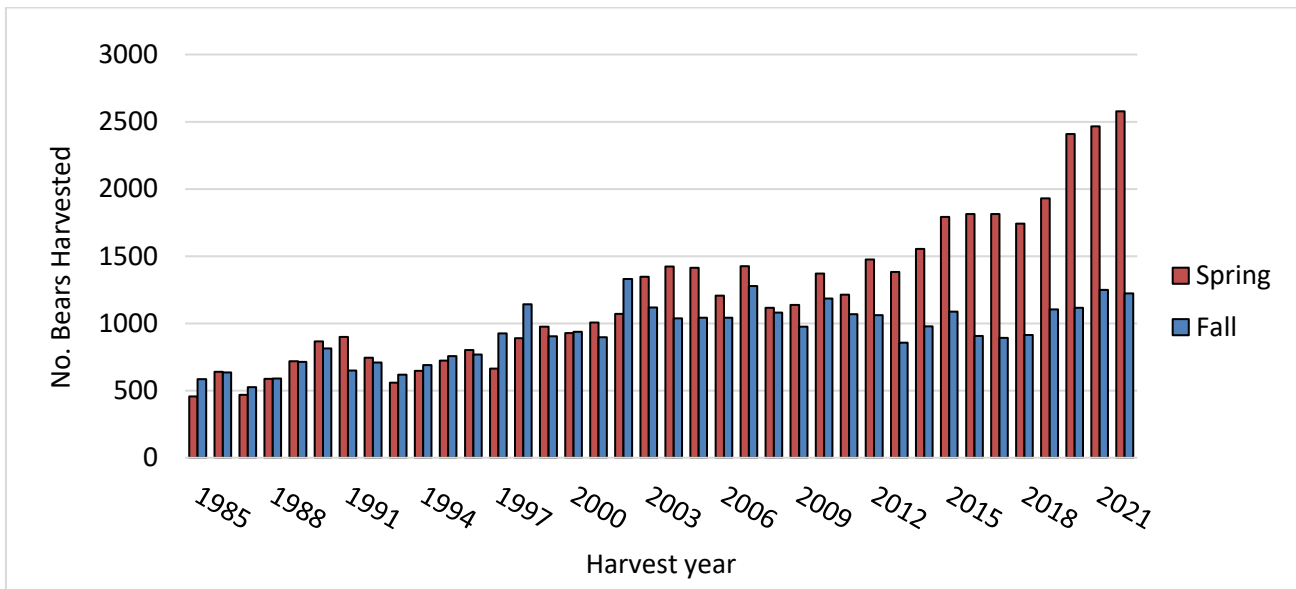
Figure 4. Documented spring and fall black bear harvest from mandatory harvest reporting in Idaho, 1985-2022.

HUNTER DEMAND

The sale of black bear tags in Idaho has increased steadily since the early 2000s. Between 2010 (33,424 tags sold) and 2021 (51,739 tags sold), total tag sales for black bears increased 55%. Comparatively, tag sales increased 28% between 2000 (26,048 tags sold) and 2010. The trend in total black bear tags sold is consistent with a similar trend in the sale of Sportsman Packages, which include a Resident Adult Combination Hunting License and tags for deer, elk, bear, mountain lion, wolf, turkey, salmon, and steelhead (Figure 5). Overall, sales of black bear tags continue to increase and mirror trends observed in the sale of tags for other big game species.
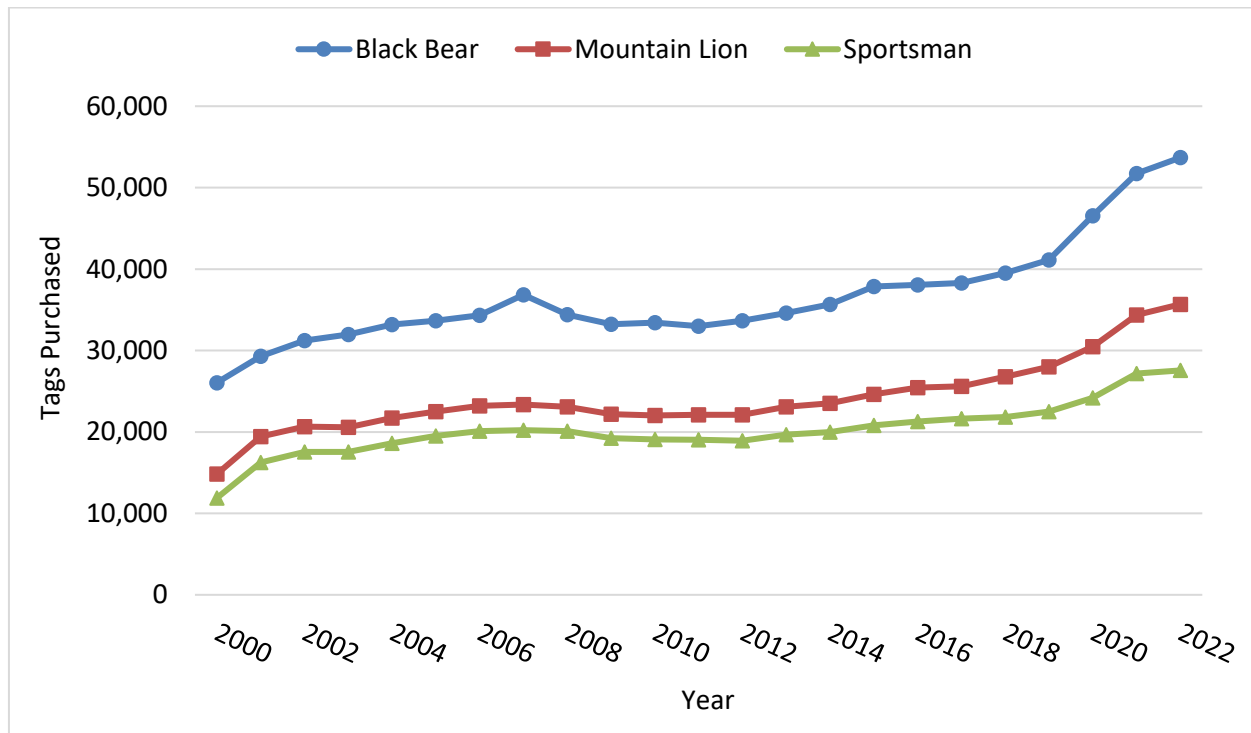
Figure 5. Total black bear and mountain lion tags (including individual tag sales and tags sold in Sportsman Packages) and individual Sportsman Packages sold in Idaho, 2000-2022.

Since the early 2000s, participation and harvest by nonresident black bear hunters in Idaho has increased consistently (Figure 6). Between 2000 to 2010, nonresident harvest averaged 30% of the state's total black bear harvest. That proportion increased to 36% of the harvest between 2010 and 2020, and over the last 3 years (2021-2023), nonresident harvest has comprised an average of 41% of the state's total harvest.

Idaho will need to continue to consider complex, and sometimes conflicting, requests from various user groups concerning black bear hunting opportunities. Many Idaho residents have expressed concerns over the growing harvest by nonresident bear hunters, especially as other western states have limited black bear hunting opportunities. "Restrict nonresident black bear hunters" was a common theme in comments received during the black bear hunter opinion survey conducted to inform the revision of this management plan. As described throughout this plan, black bear harvest management incorporates aspects of both hunting opportunity and predation management, which has traditionally resulted in relatively abundant nonresident

hunting opportunities. This is not only true for black bears, but for all of Idaho's hunted large predator species. However, it is also important to note that 2 strategies presented in Table 3 directly address putting additional effort toward evaluating nonresident hunter participation in black bear hunting. Ultimately, management of Idaho's black bear resource will strive to maintain a balance between biological objectives and resident desires, while allowing non-resident opportunity where appropriate.
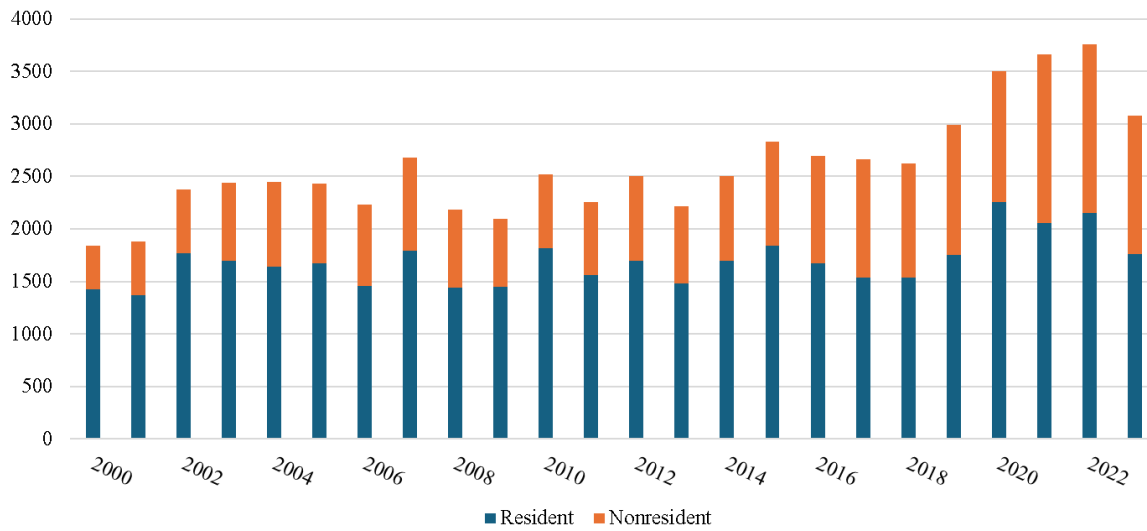
Figure 6. Total black bear harvest by resident (blue) and nonresident (orange) hunters in Idaho, 2000-2023.

BLACK BEAR POPULATION MONITORING

Understanding black bear population abundances, trends, and dynamics is important for effective management (Miller 1990, Garshelis 1993, Garshelis and Hristienko 2006). However, monitoring bear populations is challenging because bears are difficult to observe and enumerate due to the dense forest habitat they often occupy, low population densities (relative to ungulates), and their secretive and solitary behavior (Pelton et al. 1978, Harris 1986, Woods et al. 1999, Rice et al. 2001). Some states, provinces, and territories rely on a combination of relative abundance indices (e.g., harvest statistics, harvest success, nuisance activity, road kills, bear sign and sightings, bait station surveys, and results of hunter questionnaires) to monitor and manage their black bear populations (Garshelis 1990). Although the reliability of these indices is not always known and they might only be capable of detecting large changes in abundance, they are commonly used by management agencies because they are relatively easy to obtain and can be helpful in evaluating population trends (Noyce and Garshelis 1997). Some states also use population abundance modeling to monitor black bear populations (e.g., mark-recapture, population reconstruction [Mace and Chilton-Radandt 2011]).

HARVEST-BASED APPROACHES

IDFG initiated a research project in 1972 to collect biological data to inform development of a comprehensive black bear management program. A total of 6 black bear populations were included in the study: 3 in the

Panhandle, 2 in the Clearwater, and 1 in the Southwest Region. This project was designed to determine the status of each population, although data were also collected on food habits, physical condition, denning requirements, activity patterns, and habitat use patterns (Beecham and Rohlman 1994). The research demonstrated that age and sex data derived from trapping were closely correlated with that from harvest data, and therefore, harvest metrics had potential as useful measures of population status (Beecham and Rohlman 1994). Based on these findings, IDFG formally adopted harvest metrics to assess population status beginning with the 1986 black bear management plan (IDFG 1986) and has relied primarily on trends in harvest metrics to monitor black bear populations throughout the state since.

Specific metrics used by IDFG have changed over time. Periodic evaluation and analyses of black bear harvest data have identified those metrics most sensitive to population changes. For example, during the 1999-2010 Black Bear Management Plan drafting process, the planning team decided to cease monitoring median age of harvested black bears because the metric lacked the sensitivity necessary to detect annual changes in populations (IDFG 1998). The percentage of males harvested that are adults (≥5 years old) replaced median age as a more sensitive metric and was supported by 12 years of black bear research conducted by IDFG. During the 1999-2010 planning process, IDFG identified 3 harvest metrics to use for monitoring black bear populations at a data analysis unit (groups of Game Management Units based on similar habitat and black bear vulnerability characteristics) scale for the duration of the plan (Table 1). These metrics are based on the premise that the sex and age of a black bear affects its vulnerability to harvest in a consistent and predictable manner. Adult males are typically most vulnerable because they are bold (often use open areas) and have larger home ranges (Beecham and Rohlman 1994). Consequently, the adult male segment of a population is thought to be the first to be reduced by hunting pressure. Sub-adult males are assumed to be slightly less vulnerable, and females are thought to be least vulnerable, especially if accompanied by cubs. A low percentage of adult males (≥5 years old) or high percentage of females in the harvest are indicators of potential over-harvest.

Table 1. Black bear harvest metrics from 1999-2010 Idaho Black Bear Management Plan.

Criteria	Light Harvest	Moderate Harvest	Heavy Harvest
Percent Females in Harvest	<30%	30-40%	>40%
Percent of Males Harvested that are ≥5 Years of Age	>35%	25-35%	<25%
Bait Station Survey Trend	Increasing	Stable	Decreasing

Despite increases in total harvest, the percent of the total harvest that is female has remained stable between 30-40% (Figures 7 and 8). Additionally, the percent of males harvested that are ≥5 years old is slightly increasing toward the upper bound of the range of a stable population (35%; Figure 6). Although total black

bear harvest has shown considerable growth through time, harvest criteria indicate that Idaho's black bear populations have remained stable despite the increased harvest pressure.
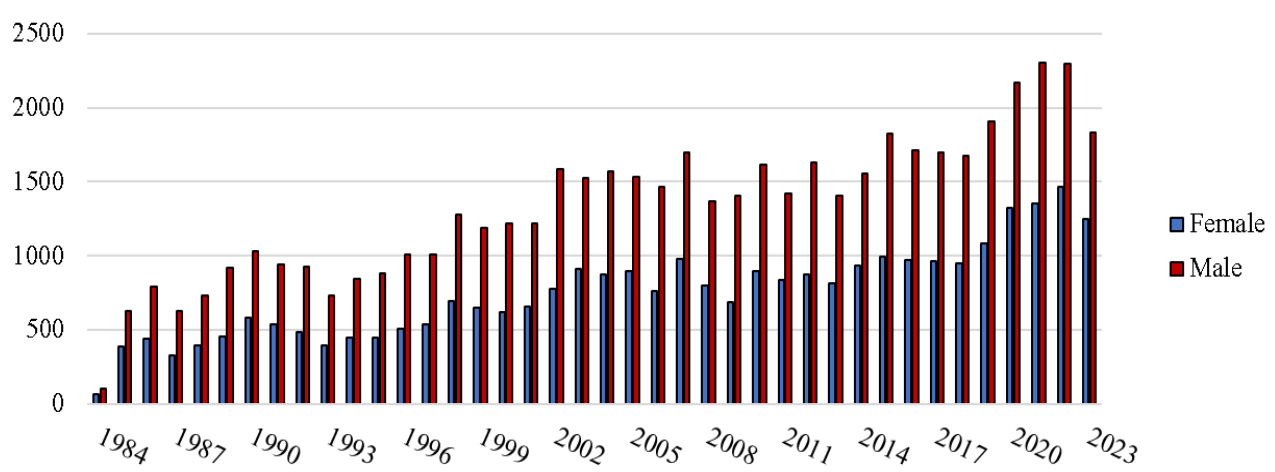
Figure 7. Documented black bear harvest by sex in Idaho, 1985-2022.
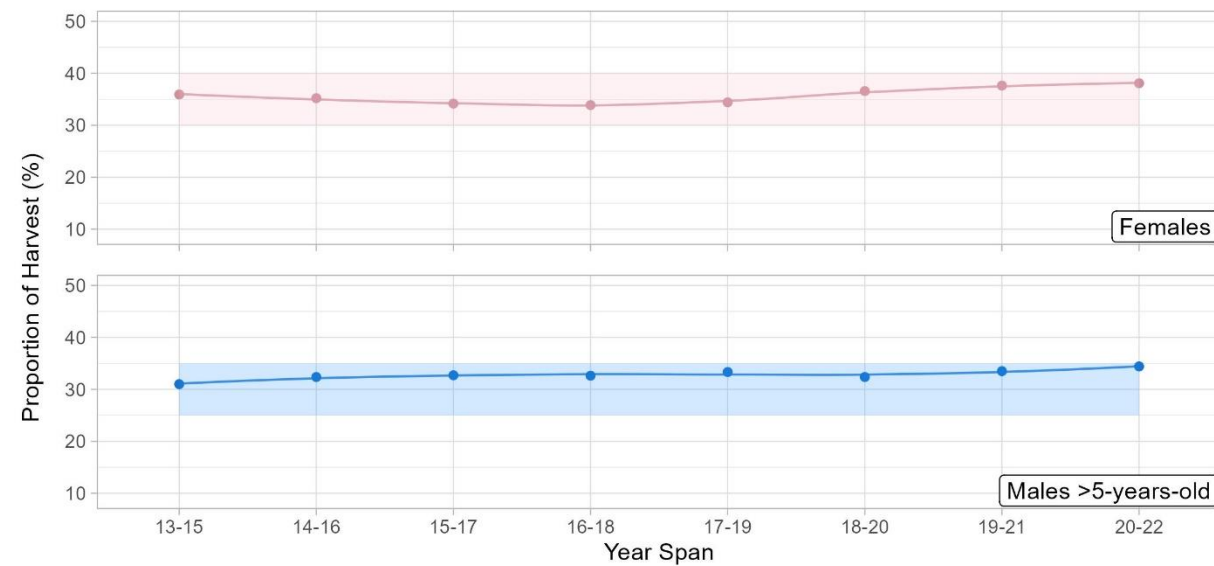
Figure 8. Proportion of statewide male black bear harvest that are adult males (≥5 yr. old; blue line) and the proportion of total black bear harvest that is female (pink line) in Idaho, 2013-2022. Proportions calculated as 3-year running averages. Shaded areas represent the ranges that would be indicative of a stable black bear population for either metric (see Table 2).

As part of the current planning process, the previous plan metrics were evaluated to determine their efficacy and sensitivity for monitoring black bear populations today. Although the previously stated assumptions that the sex and age of a black bear affects its vulnerability to harvest can be true, more recent evaluations of harvest-based metrics determined that sex and age data alone are not reliable indicators of population status because hunter harvest of black bears is not based only on availability and may be influenced by hunter

selectivity for larger, older bears (Malcom and Van Deelen 2010, Mace and Chilton-Radandt 2011). In addition, these criteria may not be sensitive enough to detect changes to harvest levels as a whole (Mace and Chilton-Radandt 2011). For these reasons, we have included additional harvest metrics in this plan to help IDFG more accurately describe population trends over (Table 2). Additionally, due to the inability of bait station surveys to provide adequate data in areas of low to moderate bear densities, IDFG has discontinued their use as a statewide population monitoring metric.

New metrics include the trends in proportion of subadult bears in the harvest, average age of harvested bears, and hunter days/bear harvested. These metrics were established using thresholds defined in the previous management plan and maintains the premise that adult male black bears are more susceptible to hunter harvest than the younger male or female segments of the population (Beecham and Rohlman 1994, IDFG 1998). Along these lines, shifts in harvest metrics that occur simultaneously and deviate from the provided criteria would be indicative of changing populations (Table 2). Metrics will be assessed annually and as 3-year running averages to account for single-year variations in the data that may arise due to annual fluctuations in harvest or food availability (Noyce and Garshelis 1997, Diefenbach et al. 2010).

In addition to bear population data, updated management considerations include evaluating local ungulate population dynamics and human-bear conflicts. These are important factors in the management of any predator population and in some cases bear population stability may not be the only management goal. Like the previous plan, these metrics are not meant to be prescriptive. They are intended to guide managers in evaluating potential hunting season changes.

Table 2. Black bear management considerations based on black bear harvest metrics representing likely population status.

Black Bear Population Status	Black Bear Harvest Metrics (3-year average)	Black Bear Population Goal	Considerations
Declining	>40% females in total harvest AND <25% adult males (≥ 5 years old) in total male harvest Increasing proportion of subadults in the harvest Decreasing average age of harvested bears Increasing hunter days/harvested bear	Consider adjusting harvest to stabilize the population	Are ungulate populations meeting objectives? Are human bear conflicts minimal or decreasing?

Stable	30-40% females in total harvest AND 25-35% adult males (≥ 5 years old) in total male harvest Stable proportions of all age and sex classes in the harvest Stable average age of harvested bears Stable hunter days/harvested bear	Maintain black bear population Maintain general seasons	Are ungulate populations meeting objectives?
Increasing	<30% females in total harvest AND >35% adult males (≥ 5 years old) in total male harvest Decreasing proportion of subadults in the harvest Increasing or stable average age of harvested bears Decreasing hunter days/harvested bear	Consider reducing black bear population if ungulate populations are not meeting objectives or human-bear conflicts are increasing If ungulate populations are meeting objective and human-bear conflicts are minimal, consider stabilizing and then maintaining an increasing bear population.	Are ungulate populations meeting objectives? Are there increasing human-bear conflicts?

The planning team also modified the spatial scale at which harvest metrics will be evaluated for the current planning timeframe. Similar to the Idaho Mountain Lion Management Plan (IDFG 2024), the planning team shifted monitoring from DAUs to IDFG administrative regions. Expanding the geographic scale at which harvest metrics are evaluated will allow IDFG to evaluate changes in black bear harvest at the regional level, which is more consistent with how most data are evaluated relative to black bear hunting season changes.

POTENTIAL FUTURE APPROACHES

CAMERA-BASED METHODS

Department research on camera-based methods to estimate wildlife abundance and density has primarily focused on the development, refinement, and implementation of 3 statistical models described by Moeller et al. (2018; time-to-event, space-to-event, and instantaneous sampling). Because the results of the time-to-event model are extremely sensitive to accurate estimation of animal movement rates, much of IDFG's focus

has been on the space-to-event and instantaneous sampling models which do not require estimating animal movement rates. To date, IDFG refinement and evaluation of these models has focused on correcting potential biases that occur when animals travel in groups, refining the estimation of confidence intervals from the space-to-event and instantaneous sampling models, accurately estimating the area effectively sampled by cameras (i.e., viewshed estimation), and evaluating the effects of differences in camera deployment (e.g., trail in viewshed vs. random, height, angle, etc.) on resulting estimates.

Between 2019–2021, IDFG collaborated with the University of Idaho to deploy 500 cameras in GMUs 6 and 10A in an effort to generate abundance and density estimates for multiple large mammal species, including black bears. Cameras were deployed using 2 different approaches: 1) at points identified with a spatially balanced random sample (150 cameras/GMU) and 2) on the nearest dirt-bottomed road or trail near a subset of randomly selected locations (100 cameras/GMU). Each camera was set to take a time-triggered photo every 10 minutes and motion-triggered photos each time an animal moved through a camera's viewshed. Abundance estimates were generated for both types of camera deployments using time- and motion-triggered images and space-to-event and time-to-event models (Moeller et al. 2018). Estimates generated from randomly deployed cameras and time-triggered photos were more biologically realistic and met the assumptions of the statistical models. Estimated black bear abundances ranged between 18 and 29 bears per 100 km2 (Nelson 2022). However, confidence intervals around those estimates were large (Nelson 2022), highlighting an issue specific to monitoring black bear and other large carnivore populations with cameras; at the current number of cameras being deployed per GMU, the number of images captured for large carnivores might be too low to generate estimates with sufficient precision to inform management. These results suggest that we may need to put out a greater number of cameras or decrease the sampling interval between time-triggered pictures to generate more useful black bear density estimates. An additional complication when monitoring bears with cameras is their propensity to approach cameras, which can lead to a large number of non-independent images and damage to cameras. The Department plans to continue refinement of these camera-based abundance estimation techniques for black bears, as well as for several other species.

MARK-RECAPTURE METHODS

Both mark-recapture and spatial capture-recapture models rely on detecting the same individuals multiple times by physical live capture, harvest, and/or noninvasive collection of biological materials (e.g., scat, hair) to estimate abundance. Camera traps, scat detection dogs, and hair snares have all been used to collect data for these type of models (Royle et al. 2009, Ruprecht et al. 2021, Gardner et al. 2010). There have also been models developed that allow the integration of multiple data types (e.g., camera traps and hair snares; Gopalaswamy et al. 2012, Royle et al. 2013). For black bears, hair collected from snares has been the most common data type used in these models (Gardner et al. 2010, Howe et al. 2013, Schmidt et al. 2022, Sun et al. 2017).

STATISTICAL POPULATION RECONSTRUCTION

Statistical population reconstruction can be used to estimate the abundance of a population for a given year using an estimate of the harvest rate and the number of individuals that were harvested in the following year.

Statistical population reconstruction places population reconstruction within an integrated population model (IPM; White and Lubow 2002), which links multiple data sources (e.g., harvest rate, number harvested, harvest mortality rate, natural mortality rate, recruitment rate, etc.) together within a population model to more accurately estimate abundance. Data collected from hunters and harvested bears during mandatory checks provides age-at-harvest data and the amount of effort (days hunted) for each successful hunter, but additional data (e.g., bear harvest rate, survival, recruitment, or abundance) would be necessary to estimate black bear abundance using statistical population reconstruction models.

PREDATION

PREDATOR-PREY RELATIONSHIPS

The relationship between black bears on their prey is complex and varies across both time and space. Unlike Idaho's other large predators, black bears rarely prey on adult deer or elk. They do, however, regularly prey on fawns and calves in the early summer (Kunkel and Mech 1994, Zager and Beecham 2006). Because predation on ungulates is largely limited to early summer, neonatal ungulates generally comprise only a small portion of black bear annual diets throughout the intermountain west (Graber and White 1983, Baldwin and Bender 2009). However, the relative contribution of ungulates to black bear diets also depends on demographic factors such as age and sex and environmental characteristics such as habitat quality and elevation (Baldwin and Bender 2009, Griffin et al. 2011, Hatch et al. 2019). Furthermore, because black bear diets vary so much seasonally, diet studies often do not fully describe the influence of black bear predation on ungulate populations.

Black bears are often the primary predator of elk calves <90 days old and are particularly effective during the first 2 weeks of an elk's life, when calves are most vulnerable (Schlegel 1986, White et al. 2010, Griffin et al. 2011). Management actions that reduce black bear densities prior to elk calving can have a strong positive impact on elk calf survival (White et al. 2010). The influence of predation on overall trends of ungulate populations is variable and predicated largely on the demographic structure and overall health of the population (Sinclair and Pech 1996). Black bear predation on elk calves is an additive source of mortality in some instances (White et al. 2010, Griffin et al. 2011) but factors such as habitat and body condition, which might pre-dispose elk calves to predation, may also play a role (Zager and Beecham 2006, White et al. 2010). For example, research in the eastern U.S. found evidence that black bears may negatively affect the recruitment of a reintroduced elk population (Yarkovich et al. 2011). Research has also suggested that predation by black bears could negatively affect ungulate populations at lower densities (Zager and Beecham 2006). Effects on populations can also vary with the suite of predators present on the landscape. Bear-caused mortality was additive in a calf elk survival study in Yellowstone National Park, where both black and grizzly bears occur (Griffin et al. 2011).

In North Idaho (GMUs 1, 6, and 10A), black bears were responsible for approximately 26% of white-tailed deer neonate mortalities during an IDFG research project conducted during 2019-2022. In other studies, black bear predation has accounted for between 11% and 49% of neonate white-tailed deer mortalities (Kautz et al.

2019, Kunkel and Mech 1994). Fewer studies have investigated the effects of black bear predation on mule deer neonates in the intermountain west (Bergman et al 2015). Those studies that have investigated this relationship either found neonatal mule deer mortality from black bears to be minimal (4%; Pojar and Bowden 2004) or highly dependent on habitat conditions (Bishop et al. 2009). A study in Utah determined black bear predation on mule deer fawns accounted for 22% of summer neonate mortality and 12 % of annual mortality (Smith 1983).

Black bears are dominant scavengers of larger carcasses and often usurp kills from mountain lions (Elbroch et al. 2014). Indeed, black bear kleptoparasitism may indirectly impact prey populations by influencing kill rates of other top predators (Murphy et al 1998, Allen 2014, Elbroch et al. 2015). In the summer, black bears, grizzly bears, mountain lions, and gray wolves all become direct competitors for newborn ungulate prey (Griffin et al. 2011, Elbroch et al. 2015). IDFG is currently investigating the interactions of predator populations and what cascading effects these interactions might have on prey populations. Preliminary results do not suggest that black bears exert a strong influence on the space-use of other large carnivores. However, there is some evidence that black bears are more likely to frequent an area soon after mountain lions, consistent with black bears pursuing opportunities to scavenge lion kills (Bassing et al. In review).

PREDATION MANAGEMENT

Managing predators both to offer hunting opportunity and to benefit prey populations presents a multifaceted challenge, primarily due to the varying societal perceptions of predators and desires for predator populations. While it is commonly believed that overall predator abundance influences predation rates, studies have yielded conflicting findings regarding the effectiveness of predator control. Predation management can be an important tool for IDFG to employ in the strategic management of prey populations, where and when needed.

In 2000, the Idaho Fish and Game Commission adopted the "Policy for Avian and Mammalian Predation" with the aim of providing a framework for the implementation of predator management initiatives by IDFG ([Predator Management | Idaho Fish and Game](#)). This policy directs IDFG to develop a predation management plan whenever there is substantial evidence indicating that predation is a key factor in prey populations not meeting management objectives. In these instances, the region managing those populations will develop a predation management plan based on knowledge of the issues affecting those prey populations and utilizing the latest scientific research to guide management strategies. Predation management plans require IDFG Director approval prior to implementation and are reviewed annually.

There are predation management plans currently in place for the Sawtooth, Panhandle, Middle Fork, Lolo, and Selway elk zones that identify objectives for more intensively managing black bear populations. Additional black bear harvest strategies implemented in some of these areas include lengthening of the spring and fall seasons, allowing for electronic calls, and in some cases, the ability to harvest a second bear.

HUMAN-BLACK BEAR CONFLICTS

The majority of black bear conflicts with humans tend to fall into 2 main categories: depredations on domestic livestock and beehives or threats to human safety. In Idaho, the most common depredations caused by black bears involve attacks on beehives or domestic sheep. The most common human safety interactions are generally related to bears gaining access to, or becoming habituated to, human food sources such as trash, orchards, or pet food. The number of black bear–human conflicts in Idaho has fluctuated annually over the past 10 years (Figure 9) and is likely related to annual fluctuations in important natural food availability (e.g., berries).
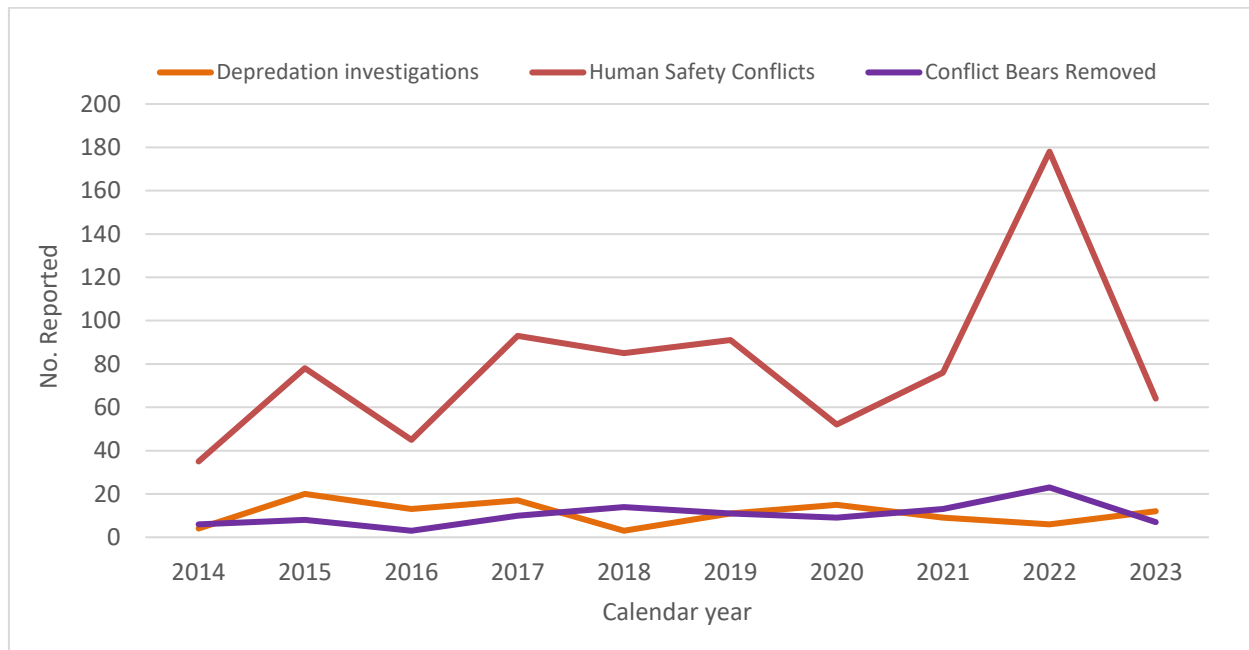
Figure 9. USDA-Wildlife Services depredation investigations, recorded human safety conflicts, and conflict bears lethally removed in Idaho, 2014-2023.

HUMAN-BLACK BEAR INTERACTIONS

IDFG policy regarding wildlife conflict is guided by research and past IDFG experience with wildlife conflict. A survey of 48 state and provincial fish and wildlife agencies conducted in 2006 indicated that most agencies identified garbage/food attractants as the most common type of human-black bear conflict (Spencer et al. 2007). Numerous resources exist describing the effect of hunting seasons on reducing nuisance complaints (Treves et al. 2010), transmittal of human food habituation from sows to cubs (Mazur and Seher 2008), effectiveness of relocation (Landriault et al. 2009), and effectiveness of aversive conditioning (Mazur 2010). Years where there are poor growing conditions for berry producing plants tend to result in more human-bear conflicts (Azad et al. 2017, LaMere et al. 2011). This body of research, along with social science research describing human attitudes towards different management strategies (Dubois and Frazier 2013, Heneghan and

Morse 2019), help inform IDFG's record keeping, management guidance, and specific actions regarding conflict bears.

IDFG has several processes that guide management of and response to reports of conflict bears. Primarily, Idaho Wildlife Public Safety Policy W-3.0 (Appendix 2) categorizes wildlife conflicts based on human injury and the observed behavior of the wildlife involved. The policy offers guidance on agency response ranging from record keeping and monitoring of wildlife not exhibiting aggressive or problem behavior to lethal removal of animals that have caused human injury or death, with a range of options in between. Further, the policy includes guidelines for responding to orphaned, injured, and problem wildlife, which includes guidance on both indirect and direct intervention designed to minimize the likelihood of habituation or domestication.

Despite improved outreach, implementation of bear-resistant garbage ordinances in some communities, and a move away from relocation of nuisance bears, reports of human-bear conflicts remain high. IDFG maintains a wildlife conflict database, accessible to all staff. During 2010-2012, the 3-year average minimum number of statewide black bear conflict reports was 95. During 2020-2022, the average was 108. Bear conflicts are particularly persistent in some of Idaho's smaller "resort" communities, such as Sun Valley, McCall, and Sandpoint, where entire towns are located within bear habitat and part-time residences make successful food and garbage storage particularly challenging.

Managing bears within urban and suburban environments can be difficult and often requires employing resources other than hunters. IDFG staff have focused on education, including news releases, distributing door hangers, and reaching out to communities via social media channels, to inform people how human behavior can affect bear behaviors. However, expanding human populations and communities with significant part-time residency create a need for near-constant outreach efforts and limits their effectiveness. Bears may be lethally removed or occasionally relocated if outreach and efforts to change bear behavior are ultimately unsuccessful.

BLACK BEAR-LIVESTOCK INTERACTIONS

As described in Idaho Statute (Title 36 Chapter 11), IDFG responds to reports of black bear depredations on livestock (including livestock, berries, and beehives) in partnership with U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal Plant and Health Inspection Services-Wildlife Services (USDA-Wildlife Services). USDA-Wildlife Services has agents that are funded through federal, state, and county sources or through individual landowners. These agents assist producers with advice and/or lethal control to address issues related to damage by black bears and other wildlife species. Idaho Code (36-1107) also provides that black bear may be disposed of by livestock owners, their employees, agents and animal damage control personnel when they are molesting or attacking livestock.

USDA Wildlife Services is the lead agency for responding to, investigating, and recording reported carnivore depredations on livestock or other agricultural resources. Where needed, they are also responsible for removal of the offending animal. For confirmed and probable damage, owners may then submit a damage claim to IDFG for compensation for losses. The number and value of claims associated with black bear depredations has varied significantly across years (Figure 10). Between 2012-2022, IDFG paid over $100,500 for 17 black bear damage claims on honey/bees/hives, sheep, and cattle (averaged around $5,900 per claim).
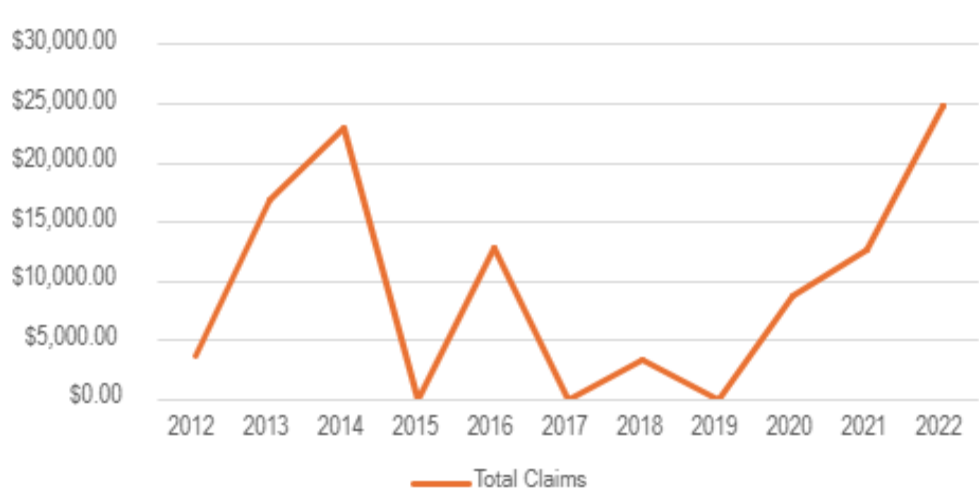
Figure 10. Total annual claim payments made for black bear depredations on livestock in Idaho, 2012-2022.

GRIZZLY BEAR CONSIDERATIONS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service classified the grizzly bear as a "threatened" species in 1975 under the Endangered Species Act. It is illegal to harm, harass, or kill grizzly bears, except in self-defense or the defense of others. As such, grizzly bears remain protected across their range in the lower 48 states. In Idaho, grizzly bears occupy some areas that overlap black bear range.

In Idaho, grizzly bears are most likely to be encountered in portions of the Panhandle Region (GMUs 1, 2, 3, 4, 4A, 6, 7 and 9) and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem portion of the Upper Snake Region (GMUs 60, 61, 62, 62A, 64, 65, 66 and 67). It is important to note that grizzly bears have also occasionally been detected outside of those areas in GMUs 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 16A, 17, 21A, 30, and 59.

In an effort to support grizzly bear management objectives while sustaining opportunities for black bear hunters, IDFG currently restricts the use of dogs and bait for black bear hunting in designated grizzly bear recovery areas (GMUs 1, 62, 62A, and part of 61). Intensive public relations work and collaboration with public and private land management agencies to address human food access has reduced the frequency of human-grizzly bear conflicts, benefitting both people and bears. The Department plans to continue using this strategy and monitoring its effectiveness.

To reduce grizzly bear conflicts, IDFG maintains a robust grizzly bear outreach and education program that reaches thousands of individuals each year. Public relations work includes bear safety programs, bear spray trainings, online education, media campaigns, and community involvement. The Department educates black bear hunters and the public on areas of potential grizzly bear occupancy and how to hunt and recreate safely in grizzly bear country (i.e., big game brochure, hunter education). The Department has also developed bear species identification education materials and is in the process of developing an online bear identification training. Identification materials and courses are intended to help reduce grizzly bear mortality by mistaken identification. All grizzly bear sightings are valuable and IDFG encourages the public to report any grizzly bear sightings at https://idfg.idaho.gov/species/observations.

The Department works closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA-Wildlife Services, and both federal and private land managers to reduce and manage grizzly bear conflicts. Additionally, IDFG coordinates with the U.S. Forest Service to reduce and manage grizzly bear conflicts occurring on federally managed lands in Idaho.

In 2024, the Idaho Fish and Game Commission approved temporary rules for black bear hunting in Idaho intended to provide additional state regulatory mechanisms in anticipation of the removal of grizzly bears from the federal endangered species list. These rules include new requirements for bear baiting and a mandatory bear identification course for hunters. Beginning September 1, 2024, any person placing bait to hunt black bears, hunting at a bait site, or witnessing the use of a bait site by a grizzly bear, must immediately report the presence of a grizzly bear at a bait station to an IDFG regional office. Starting January 1, 2025, anyone hunting black bears in Idaho must show proof that they have taken a bear identification test to help them differentiate between black bears and grizzly bears. These rules are temporary and will undergo review by the Idaho State Legislature during the 2025 legislative session.

Additional grizzly bear information can be found at:

Grizzly bear conservation and management in Idaho: https://idfg.idaho.gov/conservation/grizzly-bears

Grizzly bear/black bear identification training: https://idfg.idaho.gov/hunt/bear-info/overview

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: https://www.fws.gov/species/grizzly-bear-ursus-arctos-horribilis

Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee: https://igbconline.org/

STATEWIDE MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

This plan provides statewide management goals and strategies (Table 3) that will be used to set annual work plan activities and establish priorities for black bear management. These goals are directly related to objectives identified in the IDFG Strategic Plan, which outlines agency expectations established by the Idaho Fish and Game Commission.

In general, the intent of the 2025-2030 Idaho Black Bear Management Plan is to:

- Provide direction and tools for IDFG staff to sustainably manage black bears in Idaho.

- Assist the Idaho Fish and Game Commission with decision-making and direction for black bear management.
- Provide transparency regarding IDFG management goals for black bears, and strategies to achieve those goals
- Provide information for others, including state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and hunting groups to enable them to be engaged in black bear management.

Table 3. Idaho Department of Fish and Game statewide management goals and strategies for black bears.

Strategic Plan Objectives	Statewide Management Goal	Strategies
Maintain or improve game populations to meet the demand for hunting, fishing and trapping	Develop methods to obtain data on hunter effort, harvest per unit effort, and hunter distribution	• Evaluate expanding mandatory harvest reporting for all black bear hunters • Consider necessary resources and sample sizes for black bear hunter harvest surveys • Evaluate effects of nonresident participation in black bear hunting on overall black bear harvest rates and population management
	Continue to update and refine methods for monitoring black bear populations	• Investigate novel methods (e.g., Statistical Population Reconstruction models, cameras) for assessing black bear populations and trends • Explore ways to track annual natural forage availability to better understand its role in bear conflicts, population trends, and harvest data
	Implement management activities intended to ensure a continued harvestable surplus of black bears throughout the state	• Continue to require mandatory check for all harvested black bears • Utilize a framework of general and controlled hunts; season dates and lengths may vary across the state depending on local management objectives and social considerations • Use harvest and population metrics described in Table 2 to evaluate potential changes to harvest opportunity • Continue to protect females accompanied by young (IDAPA 13.01.08.300.01(c)) • Work with trapping community regarding assistance with the

		release of incidentally caught black bears
	Implement measures to minimize black bear depredations and nuisance issues	• Develop resources to provide education to interested landowners and livestock producers regarding tactics and measures that could reduce conflicts • Where feasible, consider utilizing local sportsmen to assist with addressing depredation and nuisance black bear issues • Explore non-lethal methods to alleviate depredation/nuisance issues • Issue kill permits in areas where hazing and other methods are not effective • Cooperate with the Idaho State Animal Damage Control Board and USDA-Wildlife Services to minimize and document livestock depredations
	Manage black bear predation to minimize negative impacts to underperforming ungulate populations	• Implement management strategies to reduce black bear predation on ungulates in areas where black bear predation has been identified as a factor contributing to underperforming ungulate populations • Improve knowledge of impacts of black bear predation on ungulate populations
Maintain a diversity of hunting, fishing, and trapping opportunities	Provide diverse black bear hunting opportunities to meet the desires of a wide variety of user groups	• Provide annual hunting opportunities • Provide for a variety of methods of take, including baiting, pursuit hounds, spot/stalk, and predator calls

		• Offer both spring and fall black bear hunting opportunity, which overlap seasons for other species where possible • Use season setting processes, surveys, and/or focus groups to better understand potential hunter interest in managing for different types of bear hunting opportunities in select areas
	Assess participation, demand, and satisfaction for black bear hunting opportunities	• Conduct periodic hunter effort/opinion surveys to better understand black bear hunter participation, effort, satisfaction, and preferences around the state • Use season setting processes, surveys, and/or focus groups to better understand potential conflicts among bear hunter groups (including resident hunter concerns about nonresident hunter numbers) and assess potential solutions
Maintain broad public support for hunting and viewing for hunting, fishing, trapping, and wildlife viewing	Provide timely and accurate public information on harvest opportunities or changes, management actions, and important news related to black bear hunting opportunities	• Continue to utilize outreach tools such as the Fish and Game website and print and broadcast media to share information • Expand utilization of social media to improve public outreach
	Improve practices related to conflict reporting and nuisance bear management	• Implement new conflict reporting database and procedures and improve regional consistency in conflict reporting • Explore ways to track annual natural forage availability to better understand its role in bear conflicts, population trends, and harvest data

		• Use IDFG W-3.0 policy for reporting and responding to wildlife-human attacks and interactions
Improve citizen involvement in the decision-making process	Provide opportunities for interested and affected stakeholders to participate in the decision-making process	• Continue to collect stakeholder input during the season setting and management planning processes • Use season setting processes, surveys, and/or focus groups to gather more information on primary themes identified from black bear hunter opinion survey, and guide future management direction
Increase public knowledge and understanding of Idaho's fish and wildlife	Develop public engagement and outreach opportunities and materials designed to inform and address human-black bear conflicts	• Continue to develop the black bear "Living with Wildlife" webpage • Continue to offer educational materials on bear identification • Develop and implement an online Bear ID training to help sportsmen and women accurately identify bear species while afield • Work with additional municipalities to develop "bear aware" practices • Increase public outreach activities to inform various user groups how to mitigate human-bear conflicts (e.g., bear spray trainings, bear safe garbage protocols, bear safety while in the field)
Increase capacity of habitat to support fish and wildlife	Incorporate black bear habitat needs into short- and long-term land use planning, and in both private and public land habitat improvement efforts	• Continue to provide technical assistance to land-use planning entities regarding potential impacts of development to wildlife populations, including black bears • Provide information to private landowners that are interested in learning more about black bear habitat needs and ways to improve/maintain black bear habitat • Support and grow land access partnership programs to improve

|		
		hunter access for black bear hunting (e.g., AccessYes!, large tracts, IDL endowment lands)

REGIONAL INFORMATION AND PRIORITIES

Management actions are often implemented at the IDFG region level through harvest management, habitat improvement projects, regional education and outreach efforts, and technical assistance. Each region has distinct bear population and habitat characteristics, hunter populations, predation management needs, and conflict areas. Because of this, regions may prioritize various aspects of black bear management differently. The sections below describe regional habitat and bear management characteristics, quantify harvest, conflict, and depredation metrics, and identify important bear management issues at the regional level.

PANHANDLE: REGION 1

GMUs 1, 2, 3, 4, 4A, 5, 6, 7, 9
The Panhandle Region is largely characterized by dense coniferous forests with abundant berry producing
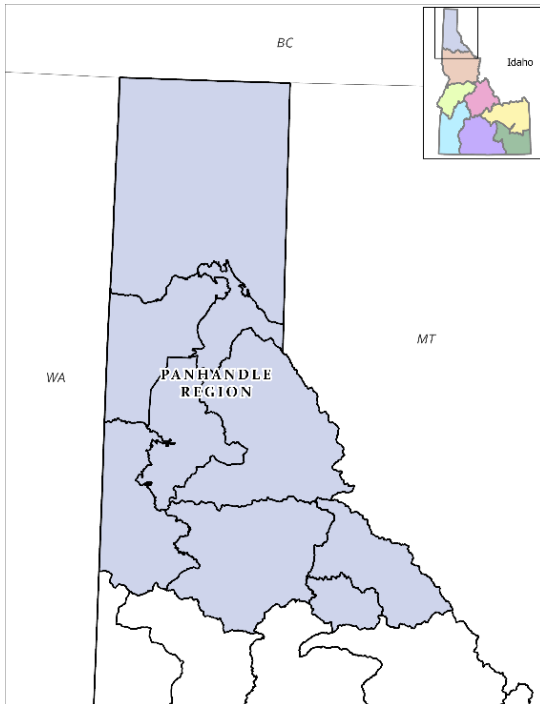
trees and shrubs, including huckleberries. Low-elevation valley bottoms consist of development and agricultural production. Landownership is a mixture of federally owned, largely unmanaged back-country forests with moderate road densities and privately owned, managed front-country forests that are highly accessible. This region contains some of the highest quality black bear habitat in Idaho and provides generous spring and fall black bear hunting opportunities. From 2014-2023, the Panhandle averaged an annual harvest of approximately 700 bears per year, with the majority of bears harvested during the spring season.

Black bear management is heavily influenced by grizzly bear management in GMU 1, as it includes parts of the Selkirk and Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Bear Recovery areas. Consequently, GMU 1 has been closed to use of bait since 1984 and to use of hounds since 1988. In 1991, a small controlled hunt allowing use of hounds was initiated in a portion of the unit outside of the recovery areas. There has been little change to harvest seasons in the unit since the late 1990s. In 2014, the traditional spring season was extended by 15 days to allow more hunting opportunity when forest roads are more accessible and free from snow.

Harvest seasons in GMUs 2, 3, and 5 have remained fairly consistent over the years. These units largely consist of developed and highly accessible areas, with relatively low levels of black bear harvest. Black bear management in these units is influenced by minimizing human-bear conflicts. In GMUs 4, 4A, 6, 7 and 9, black

bear management is influenced by underperforming elk populations. Black bears have been identified as important predators of neonate (<6-month old) deer, elk, and moose in the Panhandle Region. In 2014, IDFG implemented the Panhandle Predation Management Plan to address these population concerns. This plan provides guidance for predator management, including black bears. Strategies identified within the 2014 Panhandle Predation Management Plan to increase harvest of black bears include implementing extended seasons, reduced-price non-resident tags, and second bear tags. These strategies provide expanded harvest opportunity in areas with underperforming elk populations.

Regional black bear harvest has remained relatively stable for the last 10 years, except for a dip in 2023. Harvest metrics also indicate a stable population (Table 4). Regional harvest peaked in 2015 at 787 total bears. During the last 10 years, the majority of Panhandle hunters reported harvesting black bears using bait (39.4%) or still stalk (33.7%) harvest methods, while the remaining hunters reported using hounds (15.7%) or incidentally harvesting a bear while conducting another activity (7.8%; Figure 11).

 Current priorities for black bear management in the Panhandle Region include:
- Maintain productive black bear populations capable of supporting hunting opportunity
- Minimize impacts to ungulate populations and reduce human-black bear conflicts
- Increase community outreach regarding living and recreating safely in bear country.

Table 4. Panhandle Region black bear management metrics.

Regional Characteristics	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total harvest	634	787	699	676	627	702	729	734	783	551
Total mortalities	643	797	703	680	628	707	735	750	795	558
% females in harvest	39	36	34	39	34	42	38	36	41	45
% adult males (≥5yo)	30	27	28	31	34	28	30	26	34	-
Average age of harvested bears	4.86	4.69	5.26	5.42	5.09	5.13	4.84	4.81	5.25	-
Proportion of subadult bears in harvest	57	62	59	56	58	58	58	62	52	-
Hunter days/harvested bear	4.4	4.01	4.5	4.2	4.41	4.16	4.45	4.43	4.29	4.31
Harvest density (bears/100 mi²)	8.15	10.12	8.99	8.69	8.06	9.02	9.37	9.44	10.06	7.08
Conflicts: depredation investigations *	0	2	1	1	0	2	2	3	1	0
Conflicts: human safety**	2	3	0	1	2	4	3	8	40	3
Conflict black bears removed	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	3	6	1

*USDA-WS confirmed and probable black bear-caused livestock investigations
**Conflict types include encounters, incidents, and attacks
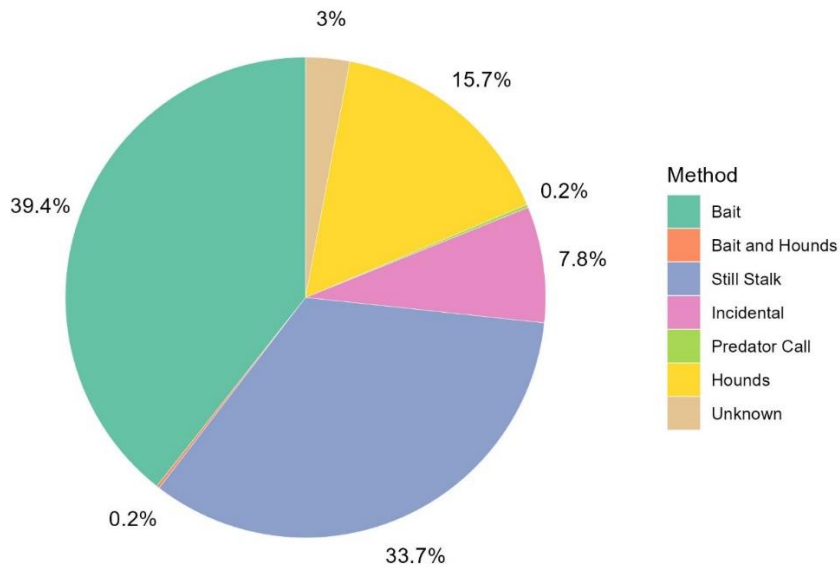
Figure 11. Proportion of total harvested black bears by method of take in the Panhandle Region of Idaho, 2014–2023.
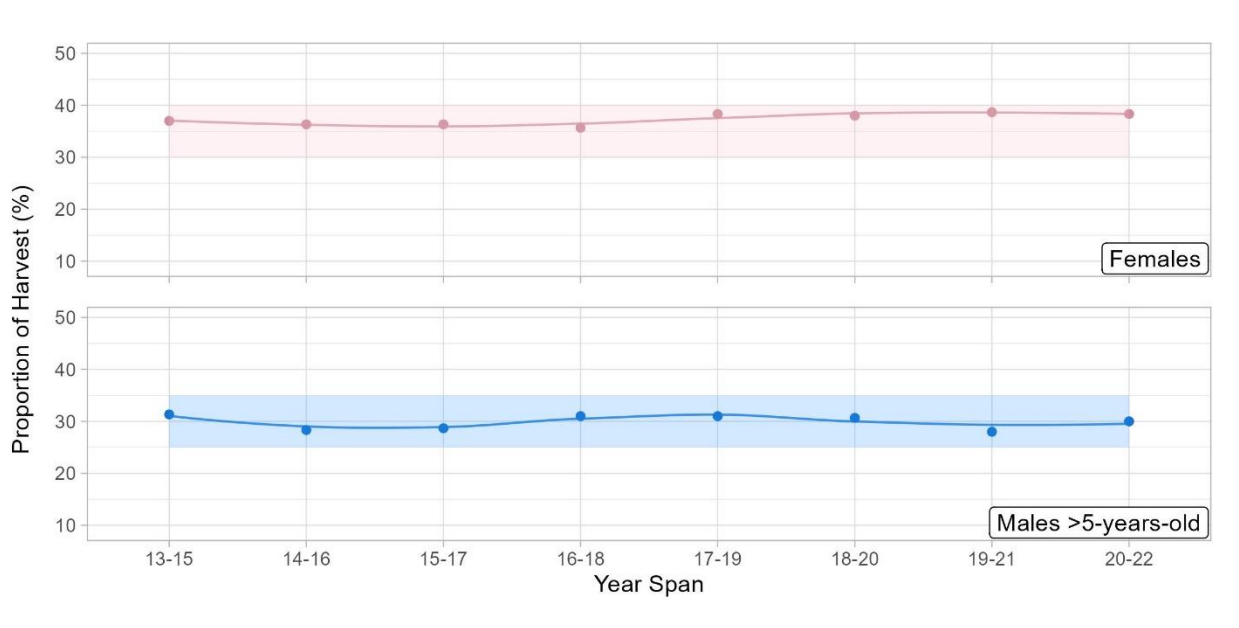
Figure 12. Proportions of total male black bear harvest that were adult males (≥ 5 yr. old; blue line) and total harvest that were female (pink line) for black bears harvested in the Panhandle Region of Idaho, 2013-2022. Proportions were calculated as 3-year running averages. Shaded areas represent the proportional ranges that would be indicative of a stable black bear population.
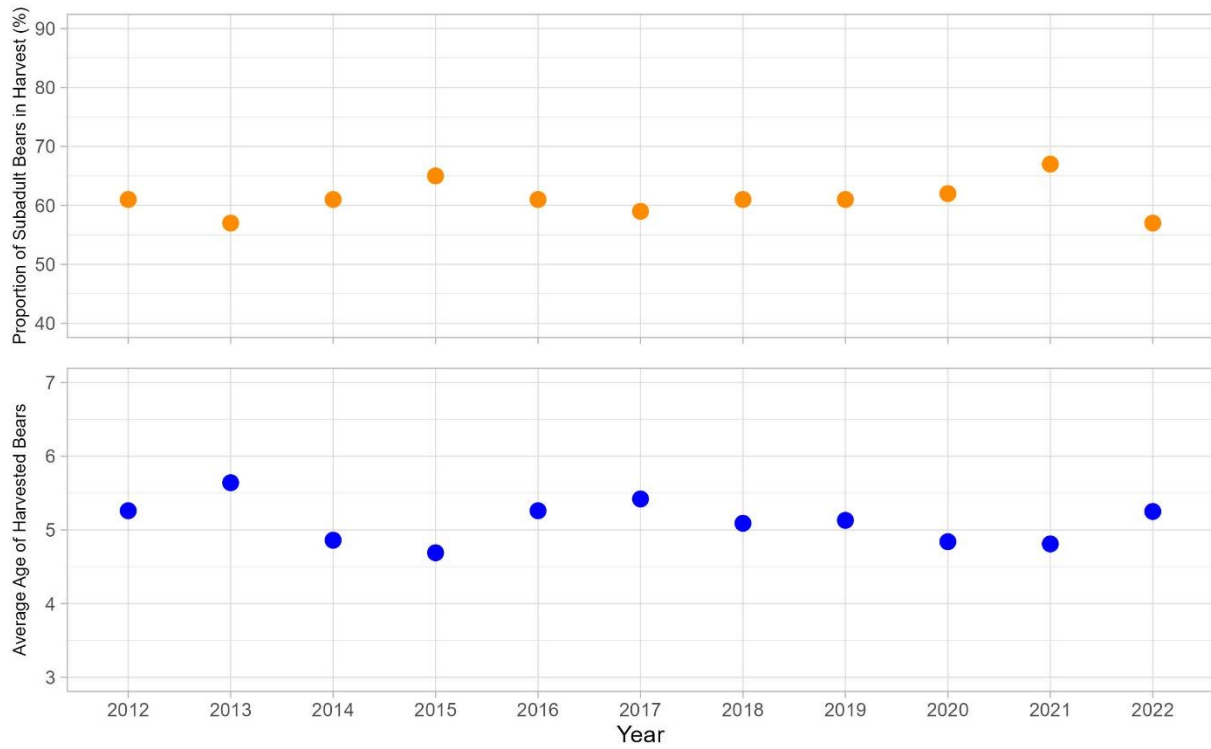
Figure 13. Proportion of total black bear harvest that was subadult bears (orange) and the average age of harvested bears (blue) for black bears harvested in the Panhandle Region of Idaho, 2012-2022.

CLEARWATER: REGION 2

GMUs 8, 8A, 10, 10A, 11, 11A, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 16A, 17, 18, 19, 20

Habitats across the Clearwater Region vary from large swaths of canyon grasslands intermixed with privately owned agricultural lands in the west to mountainous terrain dominated by coniferous forests in the east. These landscapes provide quality black bear habitat and abundant food resources, including diverse forbs and grasses, fruit-bearing trees and shrubs, fish, and wildlife. As a result, robust black bear populations are found throughout the region. Between 2014 and 2023, the Clearwater averaged an annual harvest of approximately 950 bears.

The Clearwater Region provides a diversity of black bear hunting opportunities. Black bear hunting has been in place since the recognition of black bears as big game animals in 1943. In the 1970's, an extra bear tag was made available in multiple Clearwater units allowing hunters a chance to harvest 2 bears annually. Several events between the mid-1990s and late 2000s including habitat changes, record winter conditions, and high rates of elk mortality attributed to predation resulted in significant elk population declines in the eastern portion of the region. These events prompted development of a Predation Management Plan for the Lolo and Selway Elk Zones in 2011. This plan provides guidance for predator management, including black bears. Strategies identified within the 2011 Lolo and Selway Predation Management Plan to increase harvest of black bears include implementing extended seasons, reduced-price non-resident tags, and second bear tags. Throughout the region, abundant and diverse opportunities for black bear hunting are afforded through long bear harvest seasons, multiple 2-bear units, and allowing multiple methods of take.

Regional black bear harvest has increased since 2010; however, harvest metrics continue to indicate stable populations (Table 5 and Figure 15). Harvest peaked in 2021 at 1,260 total bears. During the last 10 years, the majority of Clearwater hunters reported harvesting black bears using bait (55%), although other common harvest methods include still stalk (19.7%), the use of hounds (17.3%), and incidental harvest (7.2%; Figure 14).

Current priorities for black bear management in the Clearwater Region include:
- Maintain productive black bear populations capable of supporting diverse hunting opportunities
- Minimize domestic livestock- and human-black bear conflicts.

Table 5. Clearwater Region black bear management metrics.

Regional Characteristics	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total harvest	773	826	829	880	802	941	1059	1260	1204	954
Total mortalities	777	839	836	884	808	948	1066	1273	1216	964
% females in harvest	36	34	38	35	40	32	35	37	37	41
% adult males (≥5yo)	28	24	27	24	27	29	25	25	31	-
Average age of harvested bears	4.48	4.22	4.74	4.45	4.77	4.23	4.51	4.58	4.72	-
Proportion of subadult bears in harvest	63	68	65	68	64	66	65	65	58	-
Hunter days/harvested bear	3.51	3.66	3.39	3.34	3.43	3.40	3.75	3.48	3.74	4.01
Harvest density (bears/100 mi²)	6.44	6.88	6.91	7.33	6.68	7.84	8.82	10.5	10.03	7.95
Conflicts: depredation Investigations*	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0
Conflicts: human safety**	2	4	2	4	8	1	0	1	26	6
Conflict bears removed	1	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	4	0

*USDA-WS confirmed and probable mountain lion-caused livestock investigations
**Conflict types include encounters, incidents, and attacks
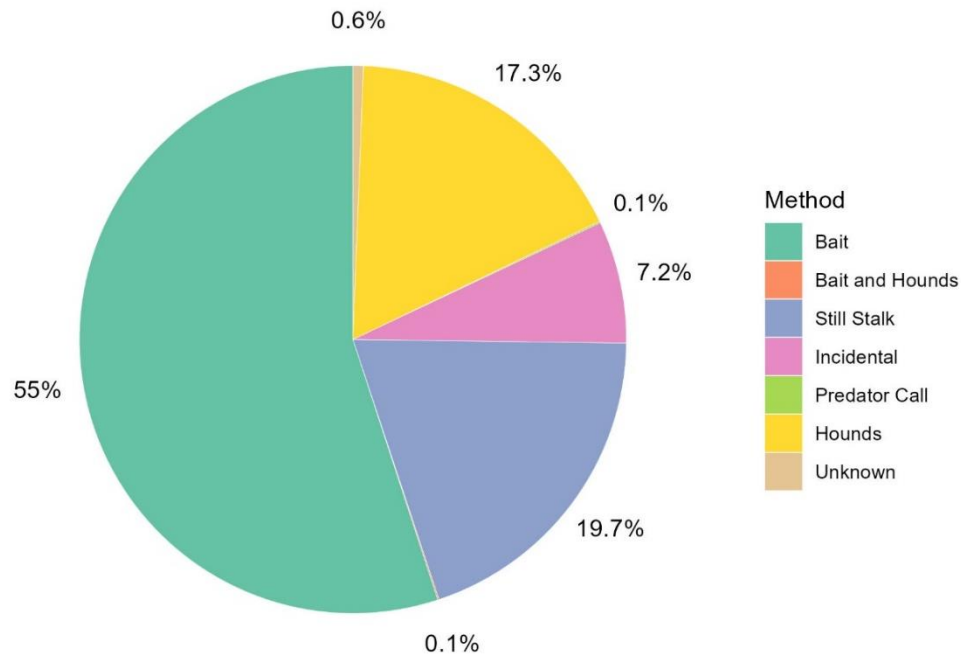
Figure 14: Proportion of total harvested black bears by method of take in the Clearwater Region of Idaho, 2013-2023.
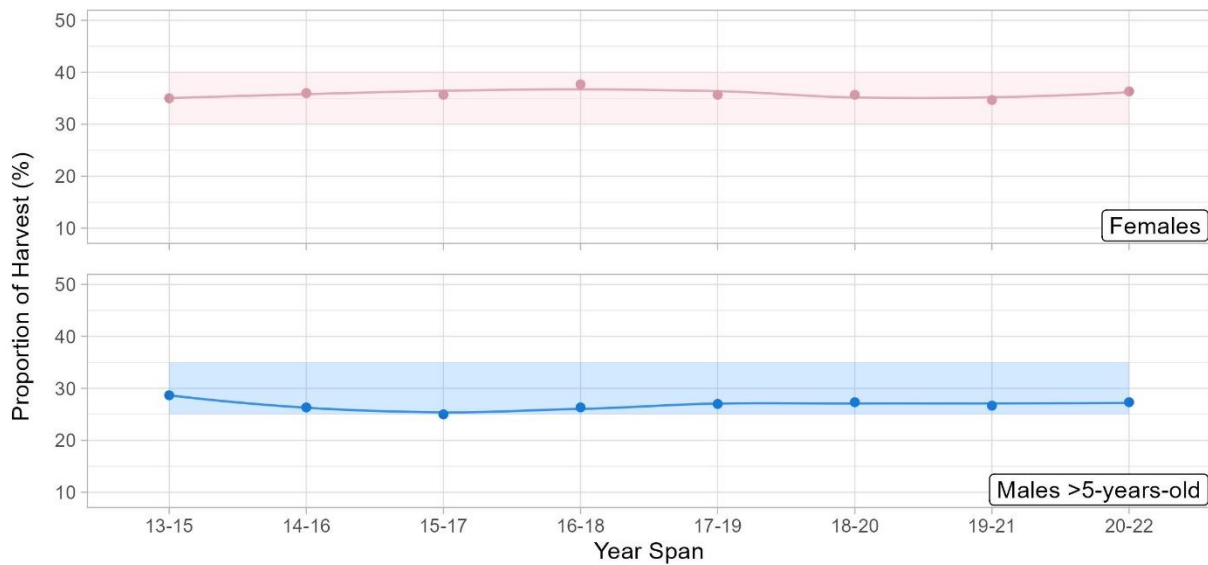
Figure 15: Proportions of total male black bear harvest that were adult males (≥ 5 yr. old; blue line) and total harvest that were female (pink line) for black bears harvested in the Clearwater Region of Idaho, 2013-2022. Proportions were calculated as 3-year running averages. Shaded areas represent the proportional ranges that would be indicative of a stable black bear population.
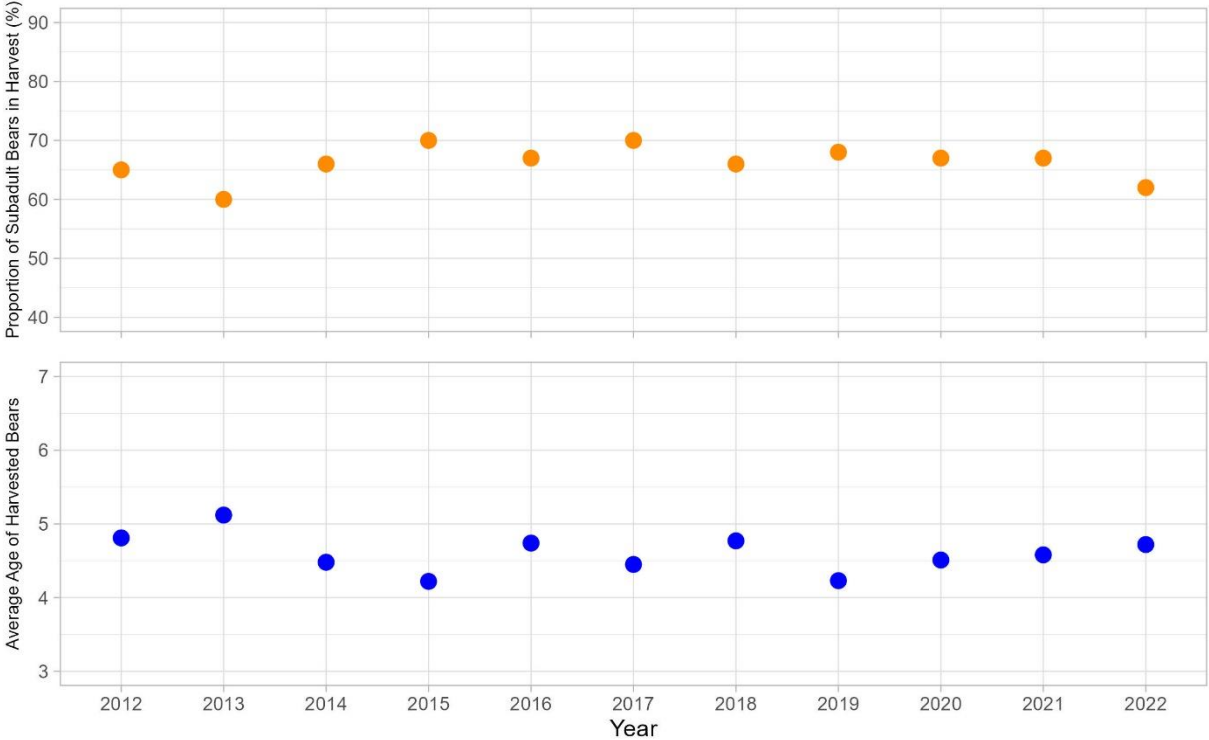
Figure 16: Proportion of total black bear harvest that was subadult bears (orange) and the average age of harvested bears (blue) for black bears harvested in the Clearwater Region of Idaho, 2012-2022.

SOUTHWEST: REGION 3 – McCALL

GMUs 19A, 20A, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 31, 32, 32A
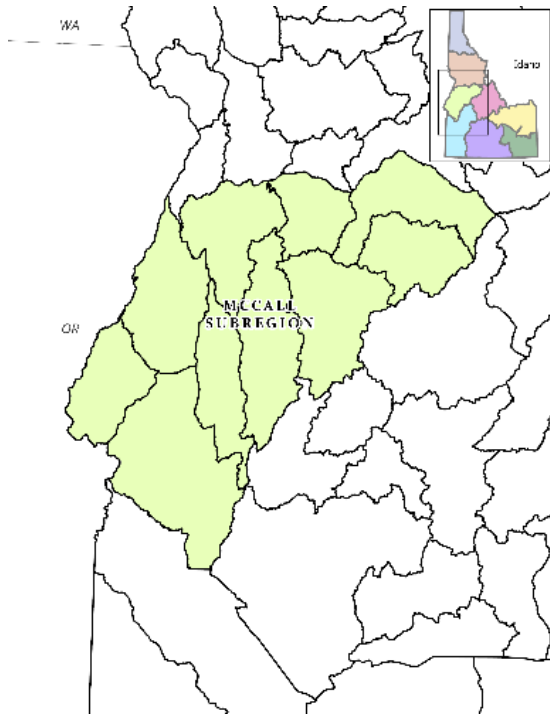
On the east side of the McCall portion of the Southwest Region, habitat is relatively dry and is of moderate quality for bears. Much of this area is wilderness (GMUs 20A and 26) and human access is very limited. In 2014, IDFG implemented the Middle Fork Predation Management Plan to address elk population concerns. This plan provides guidance for predator management, including black bears. Strategies identified within the 2014 Middle Fork Predation Management Plan to increase harvest of black bears include implementing extended seasons, reduced-price non-resident tags, and second bear tags. These strategies provide expanded harvest opportunity in areas with underperforming elk populations. Generally, despite permissive seasons, harvest in these units has been light to moderate, largely due to access constraints.

Black bears in the central portion of the subregion include populations in GMUs 19A, 23, 24, and 25. These GMUs have are slightly wetter and more productive than the eastern GMUs, resulting in good bear habitat. Human-bear interactions are common around human activity in this area, stemming primarily from poor garbage storage and fluctuating availability of natural food sources. Special regulations include a later season closure date in portions of the area designed to focus hunting effort around human activity centers to minimize potential conflicts. Harvest is typically moderate in this area.

Bears on the west side of the region occupy GMUs 22, 31, 32, and 32A. Bear habitat in this area is excellent in forested portions of these GMUs but approximately 60% of the area consists of desert and irrigated agricultural lands and provides limited value to bears. Vulnerability of bears to harvest is high in this area partly due to the high density of open roads and trails. Beginning in 1993, these units were managed as high-quality controlled hunts with no baiting allowed. Bear depredations on livestock, orchards, and apiaries increased during the 2000s under light harvest rates. Because of this, hunting opportunity was expanded incrementally beginning in 2014, mostly in the form of additional controlled hunt tags, increased youth opportunity, and tags focused on private land in an attempt to stay ahead of depredation complaints. Bear depredations persisted and in 2021, the Weiser Black Bear Working Group (WBBWG) was formed with the mission of developing recommendations for bear seasons in this area that balanced maintaining healthy bear populations with increasing bear harvest. This led to the current season structure, which includes general season hunting on or within 1 mile of private lands in units 22, 31, and 32A; an unlimited controlled hunt in most of unit 32; and bait and hounds allowed in both spring and fall seasons in all units.

Overall, total harvest in the McCall subregion remained relatively consistent at around 350 bears harvested annually through 2019. In 2020, harvest levels increased and since 2021 bear harvest has averaged 636 bears

annually. Harvest metrics including portion of the harvest comprised of females, % adult males in the male harvest, average age of harvested bears, and proportion of subadult bears have all remained somewhat consistent over the last 10 years, suggesting stable bear populations in the McCall subregion. However, recent increases in harvest levels on the west side of the region may change that trajectory.

Current priorities for black bear management in the McCall portion of the Southwest region include:
- Continue to work with local municipalities to implement bear-smart practices designed to minimize human-bear conflicts in and around communities
- Work with both landowners and bear hunters to continue refining harvest regulations in units 22, 31, 32, and 32A to provide quality hunting opportunities while also minimizing conflicts with humans and livestock
- Improve our knowledge of bear population trends and the primary drivers of those trends.

Table 6. Southwest Region (McCall) black bear management metrics.

Regional Characteristics	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total harvest	333	316	361	345	395	379	495	629	676	603
Total mortalities	336	328	372	359	411	385	501	637	689	612
% females in harvest	35	35	34	38	35	35	39	37	39	36
% adult males (≥5yo)	47	34	38	39	43	34	41	40	49	-
Average age of harvested bears	5.37	4.98	5.2	5.37	5.29	5.23	5.59	5.18	5.68	-
Proportion of subadult bears in harvest	48	59	55	55	55	61	51	54	46	-
Hunter days/harvested bear	4.22	3.99	3.9	3.82	3.98	4.03	4.02	3.34	3.6	3.53
Harvest density (bears/100 mi²)	4.25	4.04	4.61	4.41	5.05	4.84	6.32	8.04	8.64	7.7
Conflicts: depredation Investigations*	0	10	7	3	2	2	5	2	5	2
Conflicts: human safety**	27	70	40	52	68	72	38	58	98	54
Conflict bears removed	2	2	2	4	9	3	3	2	8	5

*USDA-WS confirmed and probable mountain lion-caused livestock investigations
**Conflict types include encounters, incidents, and attacks
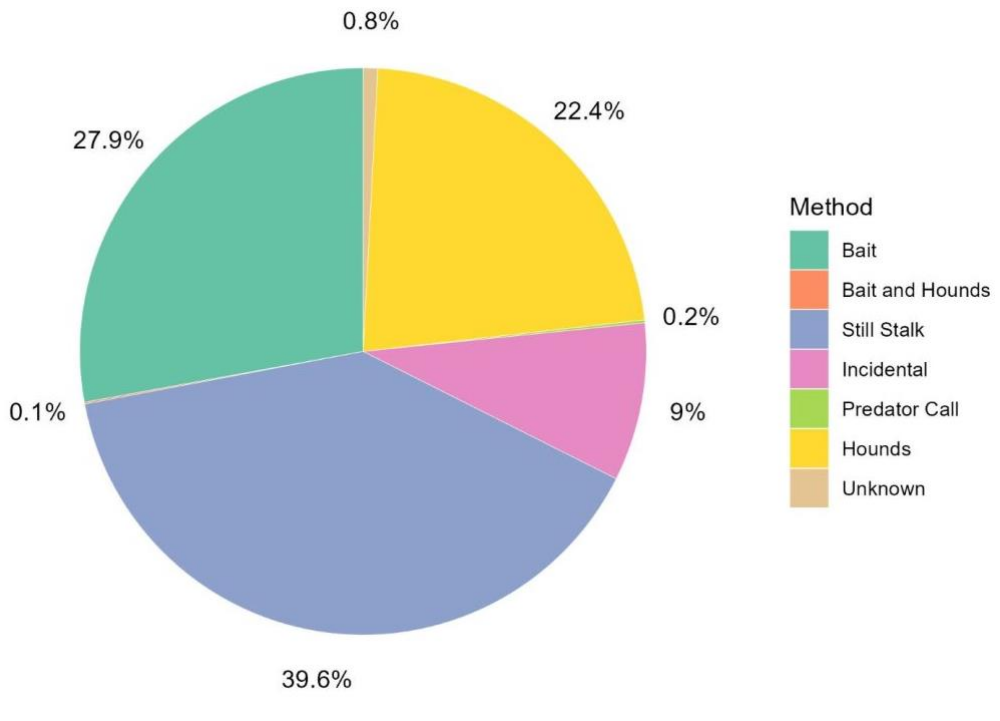
Figure 17. Percentage of total harvested black bears by method of take in the McCall portion of the Southwest Region of Idaho, 2014-2023.
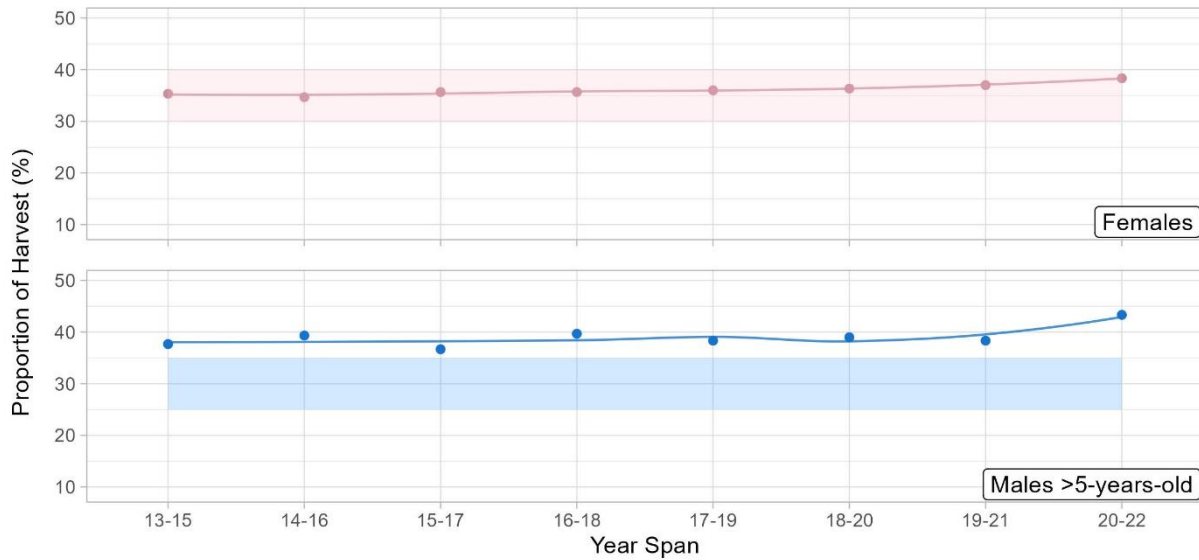
Figure 18. Proportions of total male black bear harvest that were adult males (≥ 5 yr. old; blue line) and total harvest that were female (pink line) for black bears harvested in the McCall portion of the Southwest Region of Idaho, 2013-2022. Proportions were calculated as 3-year running averages. Shaded areas represent the proportional ranges that would be indicative of a stable black bear population.

Figure 19. Proportion of total black bear harvest that was subadult bears (orange) and the average age of harvested bears (blue) for black bears harvested in the McCall portion of the Southwest Region of Idaho, 2012-2022.

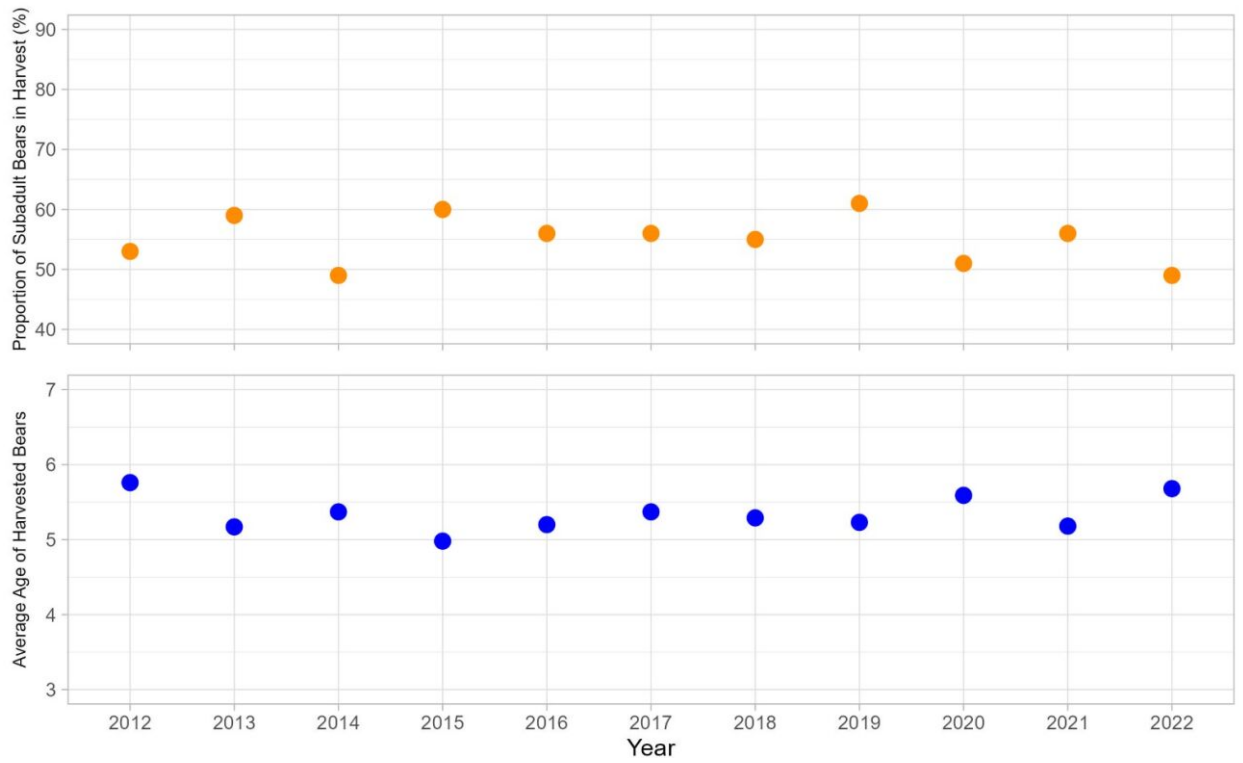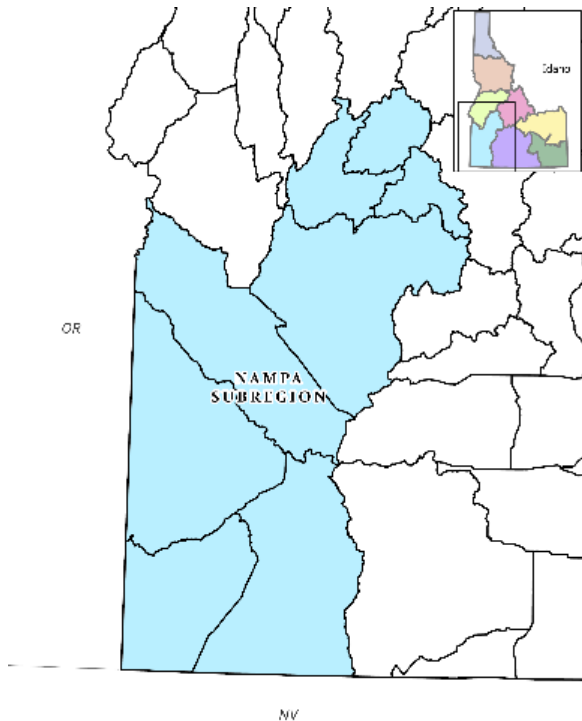## SOUTHWEST: REGION 3 – Nampa

GMUs 33, 34, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42

The north side of the Nampa portion of the Southwest Region includes GMUs 34 and 35. Habitat there is relatively dry but is still generally of good quality for bears. Most of the area is forested public land. Topography varies from large meadows to gently rolling sagebrush-dominated terrain to the extremely rugged and rocky Sawtooth Mountains. In 2012, the Department implemented the Sawtooth Predation Management Plan to address elk population concerns. This plan provides guidance for predator management, including black bears. Strategies identified within the 2012 Sawtooth Predation Management Plan to increase harvest of black bears include implementing extended seasons, reduced-price non-resident tags, and second bear tags. These strategies provide expanded harvest opportunity in areas with underperforming elk populations. Generally, despite permissive seasons, harvest in these units has been light to moderate, largely due to access constraints.

Bears in the central portion of the Nampa subregion include populations in GMUs 33 and 39. These units are made up of large drainage systems that run to the south and west. Southern exposures are mainly dry and covered with grass-shrub communities. The northern exposures are treed with conifers and have wetter vegetation communities. Berry production is inconsistent, since periodic drought conditions significantly influence mast production. The units in this area are highly roaded but still contain reserve areas that hunters infrequently access. This area is adjacent to the Boise metropolitan area, and because of this, has extensive human activity and recreation and moderate levels of human-bear conflict, including both livestock depredations and bears interacting with humans in campgrounds and suburban areas. GMU 33 is part of the Sawtooth elk zone and is therefore managed similarly to GMUs 34 and 35, consistent with the Sawtooth Predation Management Plan. These units account for much of the harvest in the Nampa subregion, both because of their productivity and because of their proximity to the Boise metropolitan area.

Total black bear harvest in the Nampa subregion steadily increased between 2014 (n= 248) and 2019 (n= 325), with the increase likely correlated with human population growth in the Boise metropolitan area during the same timeframe. Harvest peaked in 2020 at 411 bears and has averaged 375 bears annually since 2021. Harvest metrics including the percent of adult males (>5 years old) in the male harvest, average age of harvested bears, and the proportion of the harvest comprised of subadult bears have all remained somewhat consistent over the last 10 years, suggesting stable bear populations. However, the slow, upward trend in the portion of the total harvest that is female over the same period will need to be monitored, particularly if the heightened demand on the black bear resources in this area persists.

Current priorities for black bear management in the Nampa portion of the Southwest region include:

- Continue to work with local municipalities to implement bear-smart practices designed to minimize human-bear conflicts in and around communities
- Improve our knowledge of bear population trends and the primary drivers of those trends
- Continue to refine harvest regulations in units 33, 39, 34, and 35 to provide sustainable hunting opportunities while also minimizing conflicts with humans and livestock.

Table 7. Southwest Region (Nampa) black bear management metrics.

*USDA-WS confirmed and probable black bear-caused livestock investigations
**Conflict types include encounters, incidents, and attacks

Regional Characteristics	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total harvest	229	288	264	285	302	325	411	354	409	323
Total mortalities	229	290	268	288	304	327	411	361	415	325
% females in harvest	38	38	36	36	38	38	42	39	40	42
% adult males (≥5yo)	33	37	36	37	19	35	38	30	39	-
Average age of harvested bears	4.87	4.71	4.91	4.8	4.45	4.63	5.45	4.8	5.3	-
Proportion of subadult bears in harvest	62	61	59	61	71	63	53	63	53	-
Hunter days/harvested bear	4.29	4	3.66	3.99	3.79	3.66	4.46	3.87	4.51	4.11
Harvest density (bears/100 mi²)	1.95	2.45	2.25	2.43	2.57	2.77	3.5	3.02	3.49	2.75
Conflicts: depredation Investigations*	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1
Conflicts: human safety**	2	0	2	1	0	1	0	2	8	0
Conflict bears removed	0	0	1	2	1	1	0	4	2	0
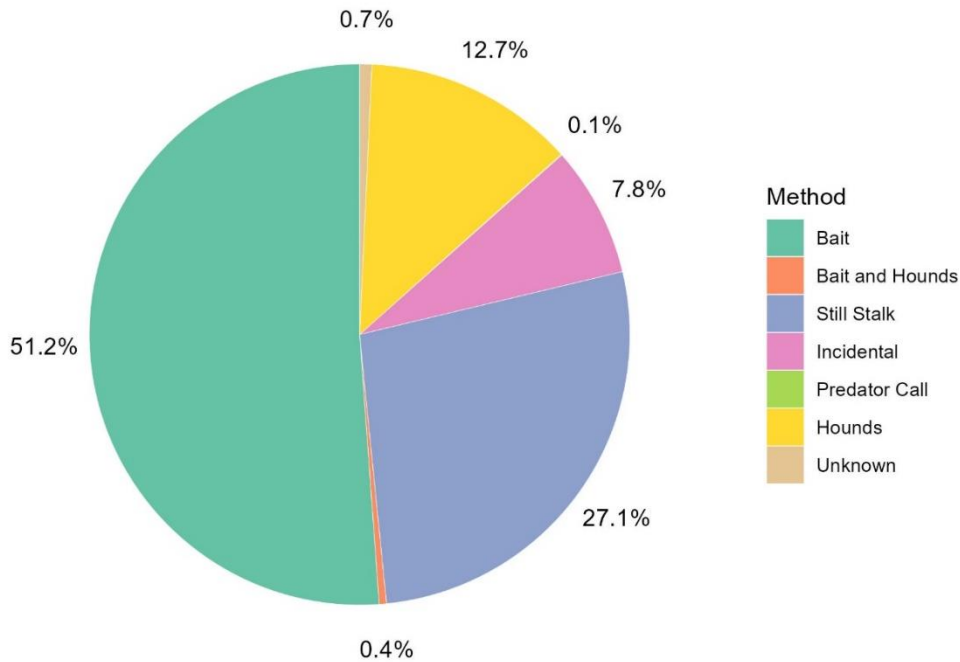
Figure 20. Percentage of total harvested black bears by method of take in the Nampa portion of the Southwest Region of Idaho, 2014-2023.
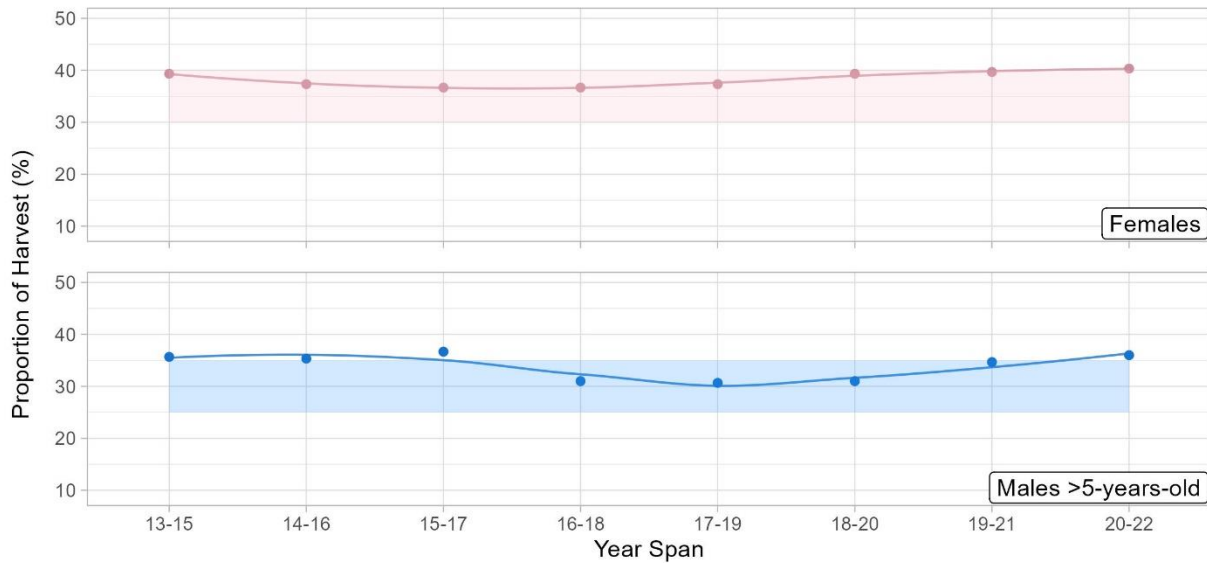
Figure 21. Proportions of total male black bear harvest that were adult males (≥ 5 yr. old; blue line) and total harvest that were female (pink line) for black bears harvested in the Nampa portion of the Southwest Region of Idaho, 2013-2022. Proportions were calculated as 3-year running averages. Shaded areas represent the proportional ranges that would be indicative of a stable black bear population.

Figure 22. Proportion of total black bear harvest that was subadult bears (orange) and the average age of harvested bears (blue) for black bears harvested in the Nampa portion of the Southwest Region of Idaho, 2012-2022.

MAGIC VALLEY: REGION 4
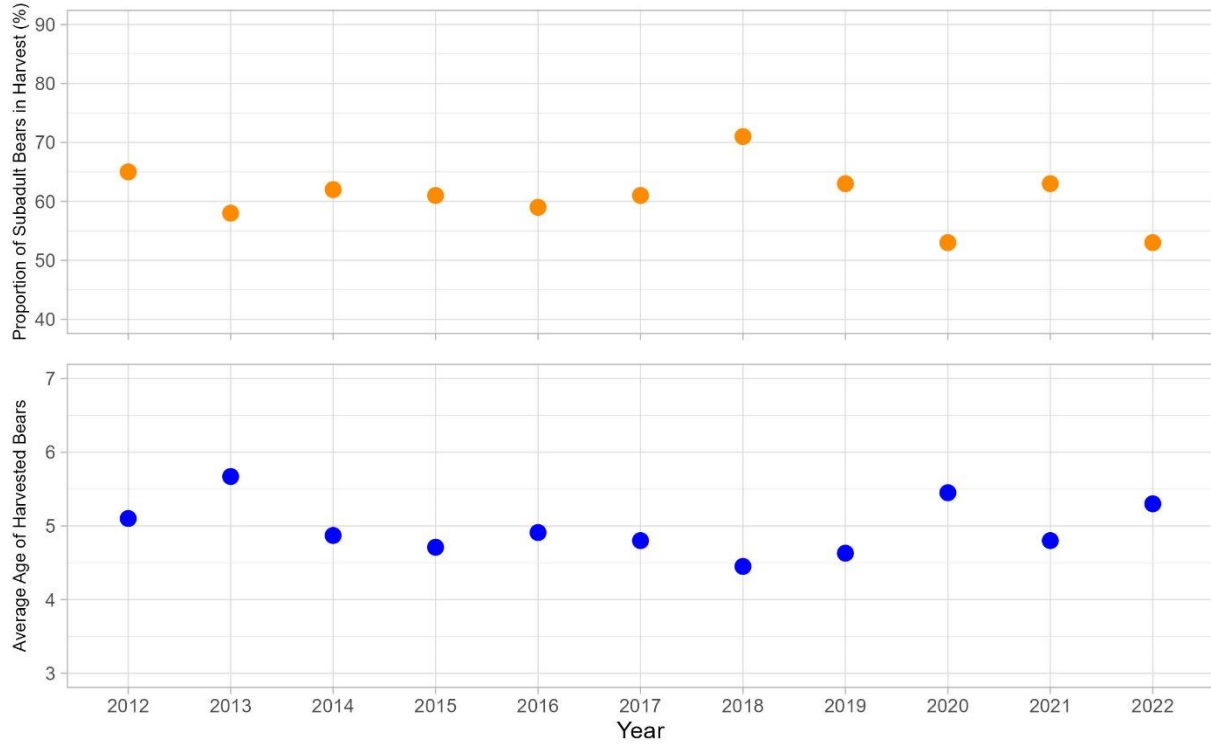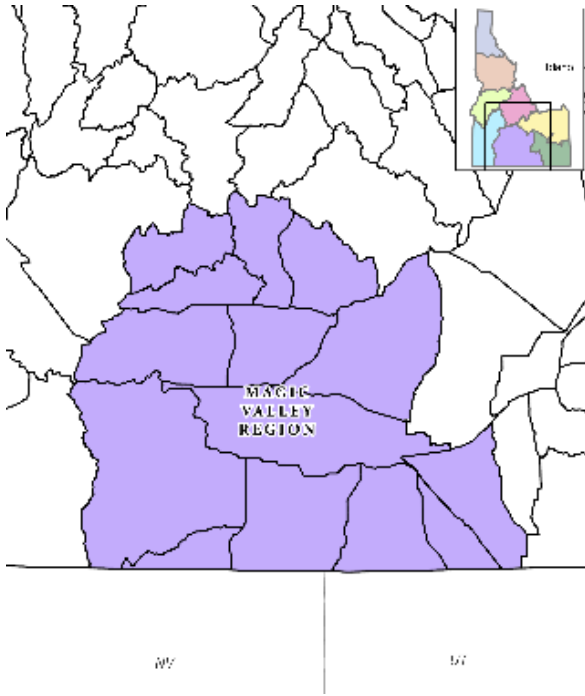
GMUs: 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 52, 52A, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57

The Magic Valley Region is situated in the south-central portion of the State and includes highly variable habitat types from the semi-arid sagebrush dominated Snake River plain to high elevation subalpine fir forests. Regional black bear populations primarily occur north of the Snake River in GMUs 43,44,45,48, and 49. Based on harvest estimates, GMU 43 supports the highest density and healthiest population of bears in the region, presumably a result of higher habitat quality. Black bears in unit 45 primarily occur in steep, high-walled basalt canyons at lower elevations and mixed conifer and aspen forests at higher elevations. Units 44, 48, and 49 are dominated by dry, open Douglas fir forests, mountain sagebrush, mixed shrub, and scattered aspen stands. Unit 43 supports many of the same habitat types, but has higher precipitation, wetter soils, and more mixed shrub habitat, which often results in an increased fall berry crop. Typical mixed shrub communities throughout all GMUs include chokecherry, snowberry, and serviceberry.

From 2013-2023 annual regional harvest averaged 117 bears, of which 40% were female and 60% were male. Approximately 45% of that harvest occurred in unit 43 and the average age of harvested bears was 4.5 years. Currently, the Magic Valley Region offers a 3-month spring take season and a 2-month fall take season in 6 GMUs (43, 44, 45, 48, 49, and 52). Popular methods of take in the region include spot and stalk, baiting, and hounds. Currently, there are no controlled hunts for black bears in the region. While hunter participation has been relatively stable over the last 10 years, hunter crowding, hunter effort, and size and age of harvested bears will continue to be assessed to ensure the Magic Valley Region is maintaining hunter participation and healthy black bear populations.

Current priorities for black bear management in the Magic Valley Region include:
- Maintain a diversity of black bear hunting opportunities
- Respond to both nuisance complaints and human safety conflicts
- Increase community outreach, focused on how to responsibly and safely live and recreate in bear country.

Table 8. Magic Valley Region black bear management metrics.

Regional Characteristics	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total harvest	111	139	115	78	97	103	148	138	130	122
Total mortalities	117	142	115	82	97	111	152	143	133	122
% females in harvest	39	41	46	33	35	41	36	37	42	55
% adult males (≥5yo)	34	29	33	33	16	27	35	29	26	-
Average age of harvested bears	5.2	5.03	5	4.35	4.21	4.94	4.88	4.74	4.64	-
Proportion of subadult bears in harvest	56	62	63	58	75	61	62	62	62	-
Hunter days/harvested bear	4.15	4.91	3.41	4.08	4.31	3.5	4.95	4.67	3.94	-
Harvest density (bears/100 mi²)	0.73	0.91	0.76	0.51	0.64	0.68	0.97	0.91	0.86	-
Conflicts: depredation Investigations*	3	4	0	1	1	1	2	1	0	4
Conflicts: human safety**	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	3	0	1
Conflict bears removed	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	0	0

*USDA-WS confirmed and probable black bear-caused livestock investigations

**Conflict types include encounters, incidents, and attacks
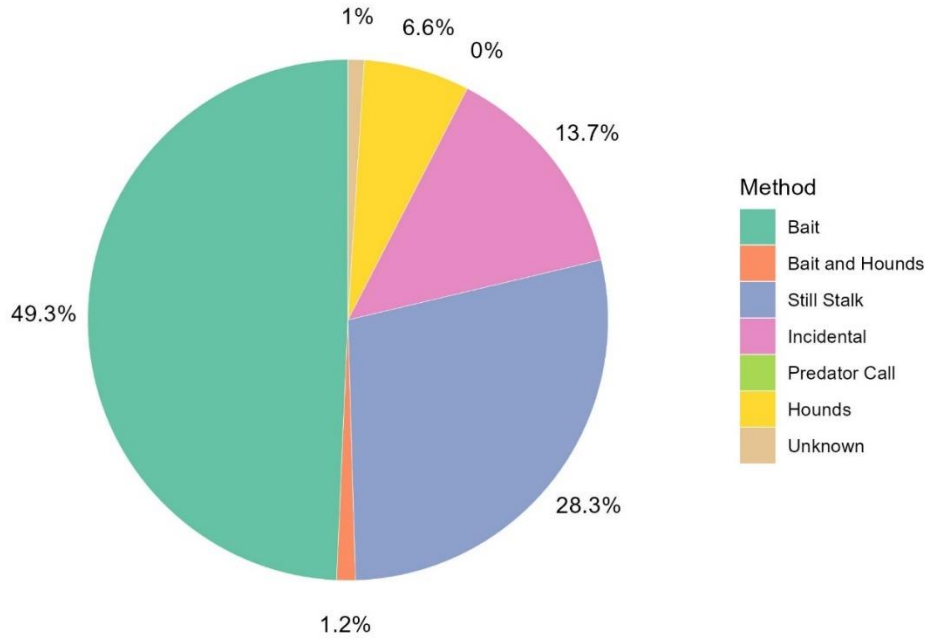
Figure 23. Percentage of total harvested black bears by method of take in the Magic Valley Region of Idaho, 2014-2023.
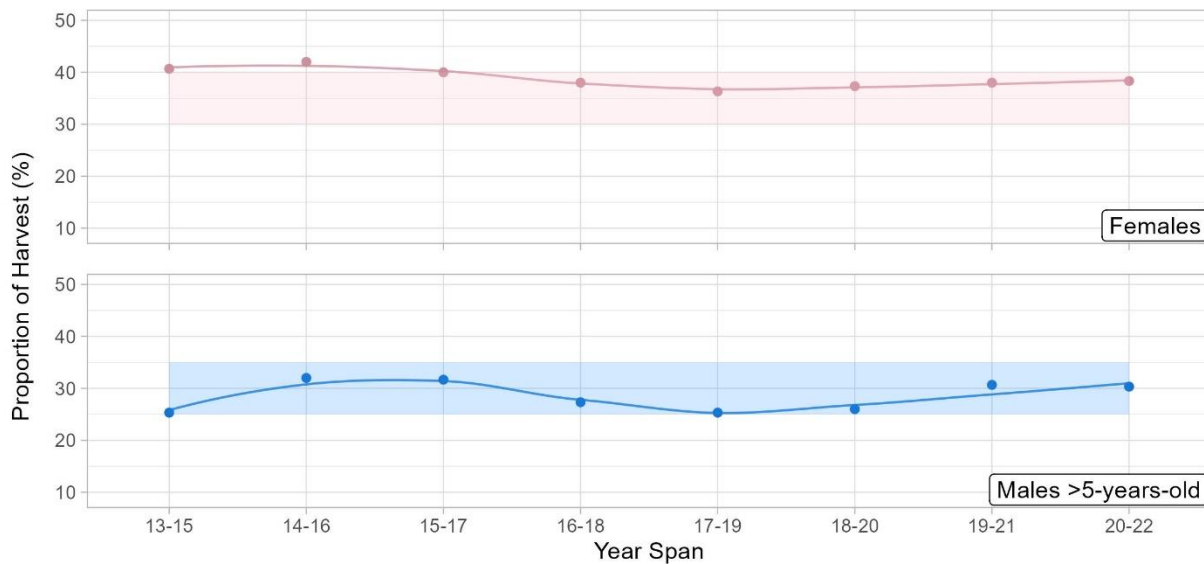
Figure 24. Proportions of total male black bear harvest that were adult males (≥ 5 yr. old; blue line) and total harvest that were female (pink line) for black bears harvested in the Magic Valley Region of Idaho, 2013-2022. Proportions were calculated as 3-year running averages. Shaded areas represent the proportional ranges that would be indicative of a stable black bear population.
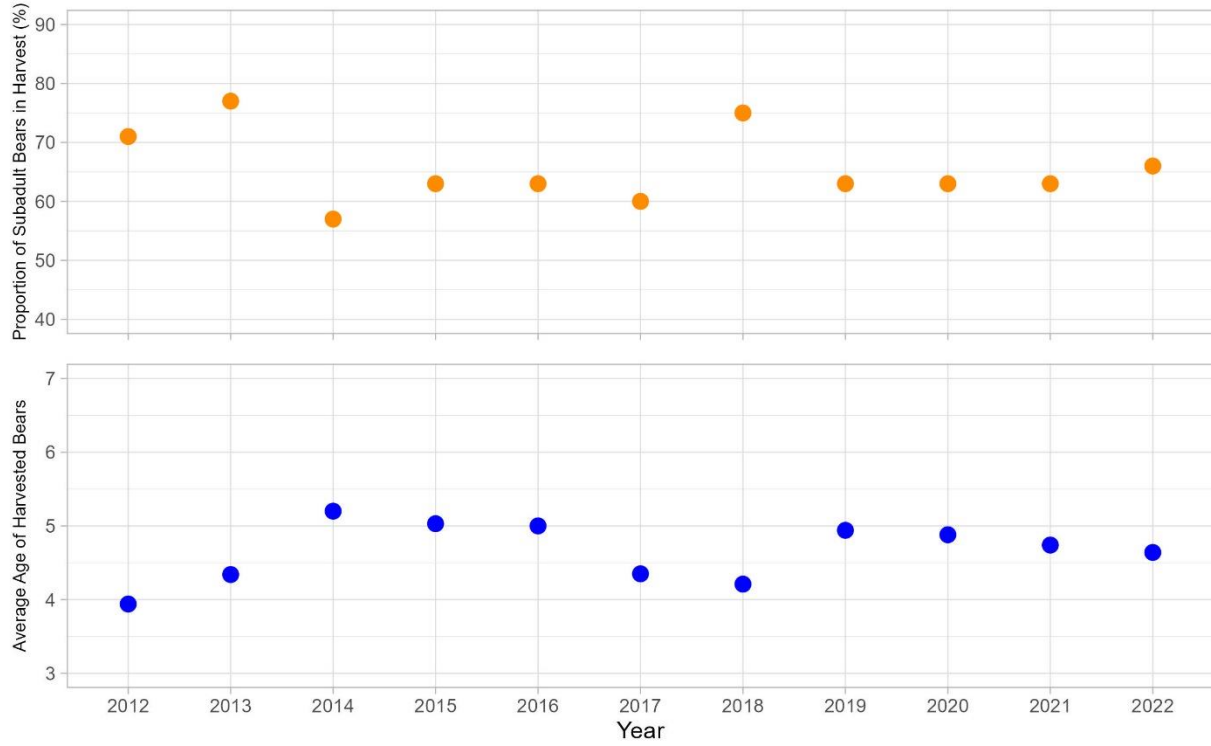
Figure 25. Proportion of total black bear harvest that was subadult bears (orange) and the average age of harvested bears (blue) for black bears harvested in the Magic Valley Region of Idaho, 2012-2022.

SOUTHEAST: REGION 5

GMUs 66A, 68, 68A, 70, 71, 72, 73, 73A, 74, 75, 75, 76, 77, 78
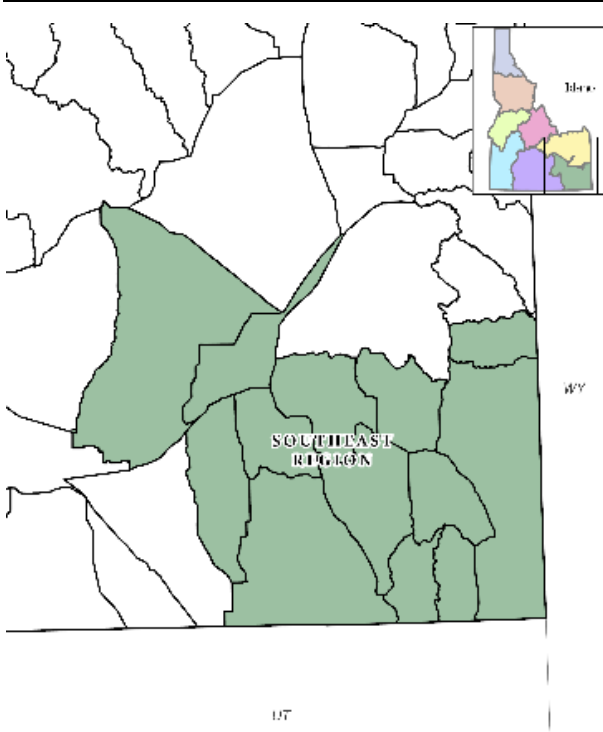
The Southeast Region is comprised of sagebrush and bitterbrush communities mixed with mahogany and juniper woodlands, high-elevation aspen and mixed-conifer forest, and cultivated agriculture lands. Black bear habitat is marginal, with chokecherry, hawthorn and huckleberry shrubs distributed unevenly across the landscape. Black bear populations remain relatively low in much of the Southeast Region, with higher densities occurring in unit 66A and 76. A total of 247 black bears have been harvested in the region since 2014, with 96% of that harvest occurring from GMUs 76 and 66A.

There are currently 2 different general-season bear hunting opportunities in the Southeast Region. There are spring and fall hunts in GMUs 66A and 76 that include the use of bait and hounds for a portion of the hunt. In 2019, IDFG initiated a new hunt in GMUs 71, 72, 74, 75, 75, 77, and 78 that did not include the use of hounds or bait. This newly formed hunt was created based on increased observations of black bears in the area. Part of the intent of the hunt is to gather additional information from hunters on the black bear population in this area. To date, 10 black bears have been harvested on this hunt.

In 2015, IDFG initiated an effort to obtain a minimum population estimate for black bears in GMUs 75, 77, and 78. A pursuit-only dog training season was implemented from June 1st – July 31st to provide opportunity for houndsmen and to gather information on black bears encountered. In addition, IDFG established a random grid of scented hair snare stations to obtain genetic samples from bears in the area. Limited information was gained from sportsman observations and no genetic samples were obtained during these efforts. Bear density in this area likely remains low; however, sightings and photographs have increased in recent years.

Current black bear management priorities in the Southeast Region include:
- Maintain hunter opportunity where appropriate
- Continue to examine hunter success and experience, particularly in the newly formed hunt
- Reduce and respond to human-bear conflicts by engaging local municipalities and encouraging bear-smart practices
- Improve our knowledge of black bear population trends and the primary divers of those trends.

Table 9. Southeast Region black bear management metrics.

Regional Characteristics	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total harvest	17	20	17	11	19	35	47	30	27	24
Total mortalities	17	21	17	11	19	36	48	30	27	24
% females in harvest	18	35	18	9	26	34	43	40	30	21
% adult males (≥5yo)	29	15	23	50	36	46	25	33	28	-
Average age of harvested bears	4.59	4.15	3.47	4.45	4.16	4.09	3.91	4.07	4.35	-
Proportion of subadult bears in harvest	65	75	76	55	63	54	64	70	74	-
Hunter days/harvested bear	4.24	5.65	3.06	4.55	4.63	4.37	4.06	4.47	3.7	4.04
Harvest density (bears/100 mi²)	0.2	0.23	0.2	0.13	0.22	0.41	0.55	0.35	0.32	0.28
Conflicts: depredation Investigations*	0	0	2	3	0	0	1	0	0	3
Conflicts: human safety**	2	0	1	0	2	1	1	0	0	0
Conflict bears removed	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

*USDA-WS confirmed and probable black bear-caused livestock investigations
**Conflict types include encounters, incidents, and attacks

Figure 26: Percentage of total harvested black bears by method of take in the Southeast Region of Idaho, 2013-2022.

Figure 27: Proportions of total male black bear harvest that were adult males (≥ 5 yr. old; blue line) and total harvest that were female (pink line) for black bears harvested in the Southeast Region of Idaho, 2013-2022. Proportions were calculated as 3-year running averages. Shaded areas represent the proportional ranges that would be indicative of a stable black bear population.

Figure 28: Proportion of total black bear harvest that was subadult bears (orange) and the average age of harvested bears (blue) for black bears harvested in the Southeast Region of Idaho, 2012-2022.

UPPER SNAKE: REGION 6

GMUs 50, 51, 58, 59, 59A, 60, 60A, 61, 62, 62A, 63, 63A, 64, 65, 66, 67, 69

The Upper Snake Region is situated in the eastern portion of Idaho and contains diverse landscapes including high desert shrub-steppe communities, sub-alpine habitats, high-elevation sagebrush deserts, sand dunes, mountain peaks over 12,000 feet, dense pine/fir/spruce forests, and many crystal-clear streams and rivers. Surface land management entities in the Upper Snake Region include private landowners, state lands, and federal lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management. This diversity in land ownership and landscapes provide robust spring and fall black bear hunting opportunities throughout the region.

The average number of black bears harvested annually in the Upper Snake region from 2014-2023 was 228. Total black bear harvest in the region has ranged from 173 in 2017 to 280 in 2020.
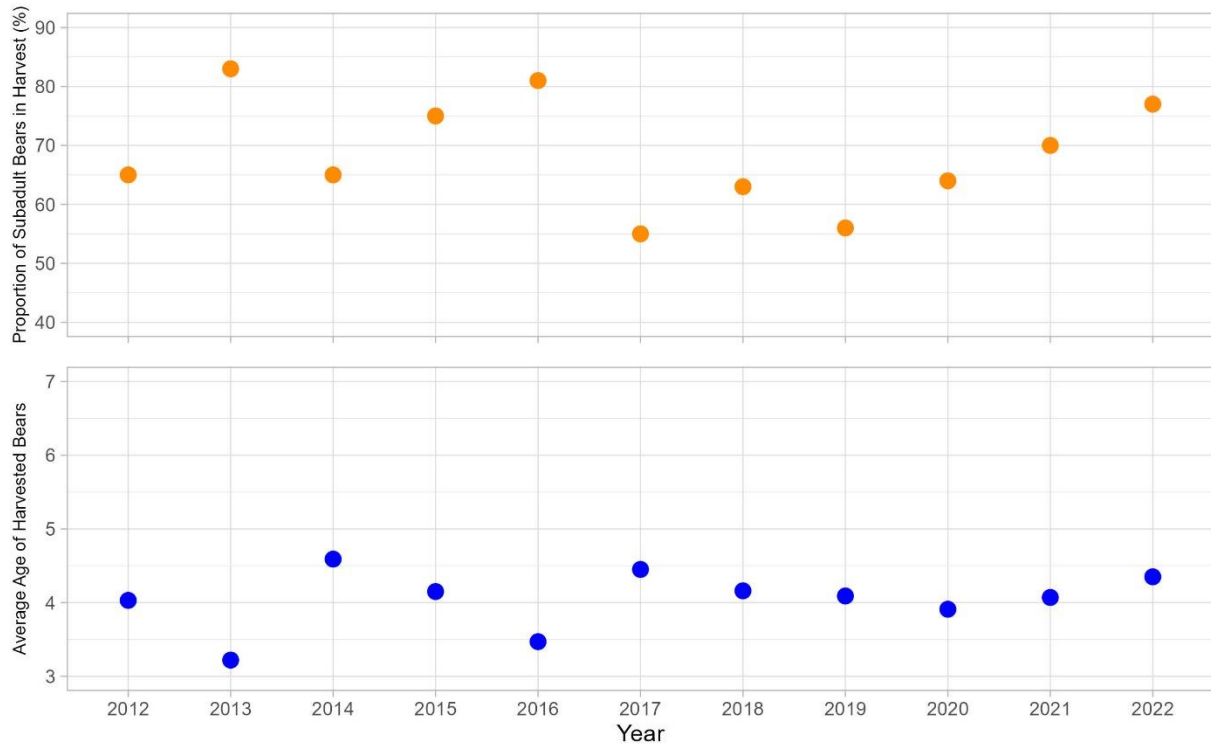
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service classified the grizzly bear as a "threatened" species in 1975 under the Endangered Species Act. As such, grizzly bears remain protected across their range in the lower 48 states. In Idaho, grizzly bears occupy ranges that overlap black bears. Grizzly bears may be encountered in GMU's 60, 61, 62, 62A, 64, 65, 66, and 67 of the Upper Snake region. In an effort to maintain grizzly bear management objectives and strategies while sustaining opportunities for black bear hunters, IDFG currently restricts the use of dogs and bait to hunt black bears in designated grizzly bear recovery areas. Bait and dogs are prohibited in the portion of GMU 61 within Fremont County and east of Howard Creek in Clark County and in GMUs 62 and 62A. Because of the potential presence of grizzly bears, it is important for hunters to be familiar with bear species identification and safe hunting practices in grizzly bear country.

Current black bear management priorities in the Upper Snake region include:
- Maintain a diversity of black bear hunting opportunities
- Respond to both nuisance complaints and human safety conflicts
- Increase community outreach, focused on how to responsibly live and recreate in bear country in an effort to minimize human-bear conflicts
- Continue to work to reduce bear-livestock conflicts across the region.

Table 10. Upper Snake Region black bear management metrics.

Regional Characteristics	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total harvest	207	217	196	173	179	265	280	268	252	248
Total mortalities	211	220	196	177	179	270	283	269	257	250
% females in harvest	39	32	35	34	31	38	37	38	40	33
% adult males (≥5yo)	34	29	29	33	20	33	31	34	35	-
Average age of harvested bears	4.41	4.82	4.76	4.8	4.4	4.79	4.83	4.79	5.13	-
Proportion of subadult bears in harvest	60	61	60	62	72	62	64	60	55	-
Hunter days/harvested bear	4.04	4.18	3.86	4.84	4.29	4.17	4.26	4.52	4.48	3.8
Harvest density (bears/100 mi²)	1.72	1.81	1.63	1.44	1.49	2.21	2.33	2.23	2.1	2.07
Conflicts: depredation Investigations*	0	2	0	4	0	3	2	2	0	2
Conflicts: human safety**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
Conflict bears removed	1	2	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	-

*USDA-WS confirmed and probable black bear-caused livestock investigations
**Conflict types include encounters, incidents, and attacks

Figure 29. Percentage of total harvested black bears by method of take in the Upper Snake Region of Idaho, 2013-2023.

Figure 30. Proportions of total male black bear harvest that were adult males (≥ 5 yr. old; blue line) and total harvest that were female (pink line) for black bears harvested in the Upper Snake Region of Idaho, 2013-2022. Proportions were calculated as 3-year running averages. Shaded areas represent the proportional ranges that would be indicative of a stable black bear population.

Figure 31. Proportion of total black bear harvest that was subadult bears (orange) and the average age of harvested bears (blue) for black bears harvested in the Upper Snake Region of Idaho, 2013-2022.

SALMON: REGION 7

GMUs: 21, 21A, 27, 28, 29, 30, 30A, 36, 36A, 36B, 37, 37A
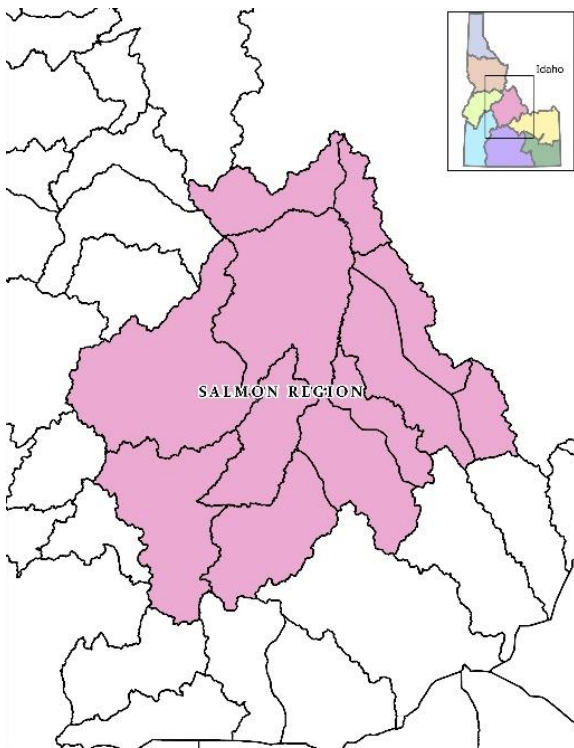
Black bear habitat availability and quality is highly variable across the Salmon Region. This, along with land management policies that affect access, drives the pattern of black bear distribution and harvest observed in the region. A significant portion of the Salmon Region is comprised of lower elevation dry river-breaks and foothill sagebrush-bunchgrass habitat that offers little in terms of bear habitat; although riparian zones in these areas do provide some berry production that bears utilize. Most black bear habitat in the region occurs in forested areas at mid-to-upper elevations but is generally of low-to-moderate quality due to relatively low spring-summer precipitation. Much of the higher quality habitat occurs 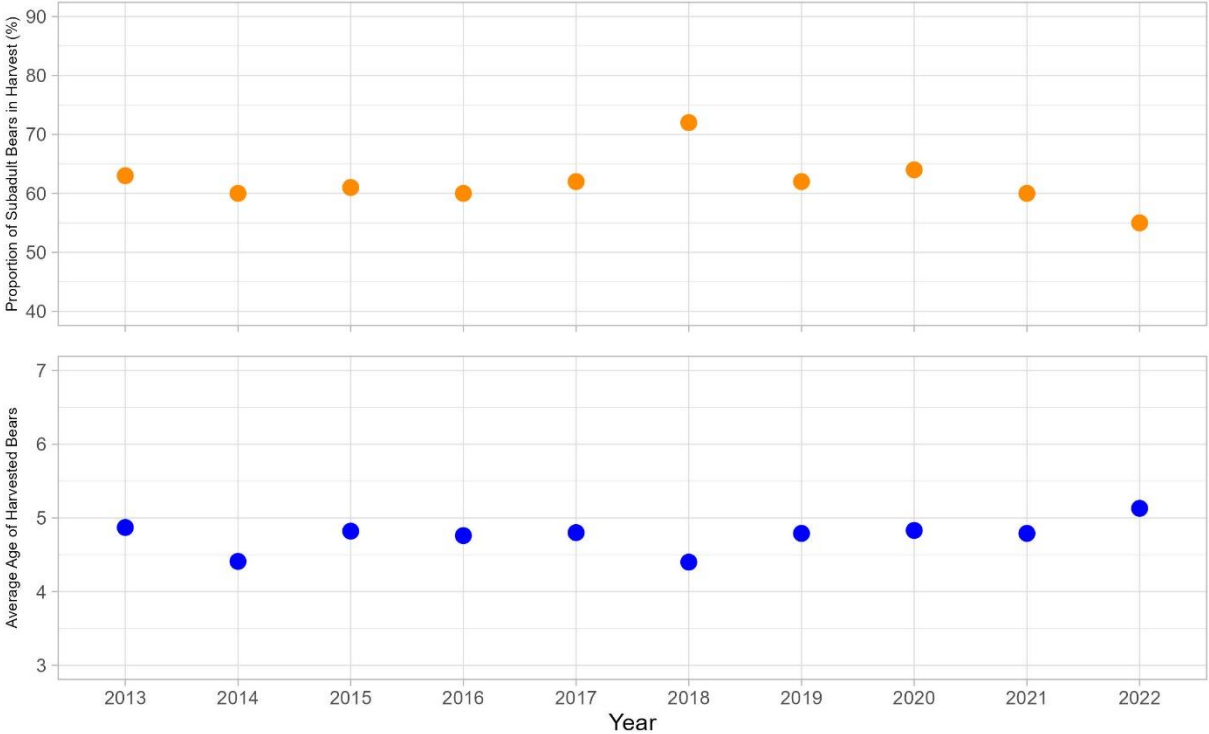in the northern part of the region and along the Idaho-Montana divide where greater precipitation results in more mesic forested areas. The southeastern portion of the region is primarily a low precipitation zone with broad, treeless valleys and scattered pockets of bear habitat in the mountains. Much of this area is in marginal sagebrush-grassland habitats or active agriculture.

Black bear harvest is managed through lengthy spring and fall general seasons across the entire region. Take is limited to 1 bear per year in most of the region, although bag limits were changed to allow an additional bear tag in GMU 27 (2002) and the wilderness portions of GMUs 21 and 28 (2015) to encourage additional harvest. Total season length (spring and fall combined) has been somewhat variable across the region due to differences in management objectives or concerns of susceptibility to harvest. In 2013, the seasons in some GMUs (29, 30, 30A, 36A, 37, 37A) were shortened to reduce female harvest, whereas seasons were extended in 2018 in other GMUs (21, 21A, 28, 36B) to offer increased opportunity in an attempt to increase harvest.

The Department implemented the Sawtooth Predation Management plan in 2012 and the Middle Fork Predation Management Plan in 2014 to address elk population concerns. These apply to 2 GMUs in the Salmon Region: 27 and 36. These plans provide guidance for predator management, including black bears. Strategies identified within these plans to increase harvest of black bears include implementing extended seasons, reduced-price non-resident tags, and second bear tags. These strategies provide expanded harvest opportunity in areas with underperforming elk populations. Chronic bear complaints, that peaked in 2017 (primarily in GMU 36), were effectively mitigated through a cooperative effort between IDFG and the Sawtooth National Recreation Area to implement campground food storage orders.

Black bear harvest has increased over the previous 10 years (Table 11). The majority of black bear harvest occurs in spring, with baiting as the most common method of take, although the use of hounds is also popular in the region (Figure 29). The proportion of >5-year-old male bears in the male harvest indicates a growing population, whereas other harvest metrics suggest stability (Figures 30 and 31).

Current black bear management priorities for the Salmon Region include:

- Monitor and sustain healthy black bear populations using up-to-date scientifically based knowledge
- Continue to provide a variety of diverse black bear hunting opportunities
- Continue to pursue alternative methods to monitor black bear populations
- Address human-bear conflicts in an effective, timely fashion

Table 11. Salmon Region black bear management metrics.
*USDA-WS confirmed and probable mountain lion-caused livestock investigations

Regional Characteristics	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total harvest	198	239	211	218	205	238	327	248	279	249
Total mortalities	202	241	211	224	210	249	330	252	287	251
% females in harvest	40	31	38	35	36	32	41	36	34	39
% adult males (≥5yo)	48	44	41	44	41	43	43	44	51	-
Average age of harvested bears	5.89	5.39	5.67	5.14	5.51	5.46	5.73	5.15	6.02	-
Proportion of subadult bears in harvest	46	48	50	53	51	53	50	54	43	-
Hunter days/harvested bear	4.11	4.21	4.61	3.76	4.33	4.89	4.33	4.22	4.22	3.73
Harvest density (bears/100 mi²)	2.35	2.83	2.5	2.58	2.43	2.82	3.87	2.94	3.3	2.95
Conflicts: depredation Investigations*	0	1	3	3	0	3	0	0	0	0
Conflicts: human safety**	0	1	0	35	4	12	9	4	4	2
Conflict bears removed	2	1	0	3	0	3	2	2	2	1

**Conflict types include encounters, incidents, and attacks

Figure 32. Percentage of total harvested black bears by method of take in the Salmon Region of Idaho, 2014-2023.

Figure 33. Proportions of total male black bear harvest that were adult males (≥ 5 yr. old; blue line) and total harvest that were female (pink line) for black bears harvested in the Salmon Region of Idaho, 2013-2022. Proportions were calculated as 3-year running averages. Shaded areas represent the proportional ranges that would be indicative of a stable black bear population.

Figure 34. Proportion of total black bear harvest that was subadult bears (orange) and the average age of harvested bears (blue) for black bears harvested in the Salmon Region of Idaho, 2012-2022.

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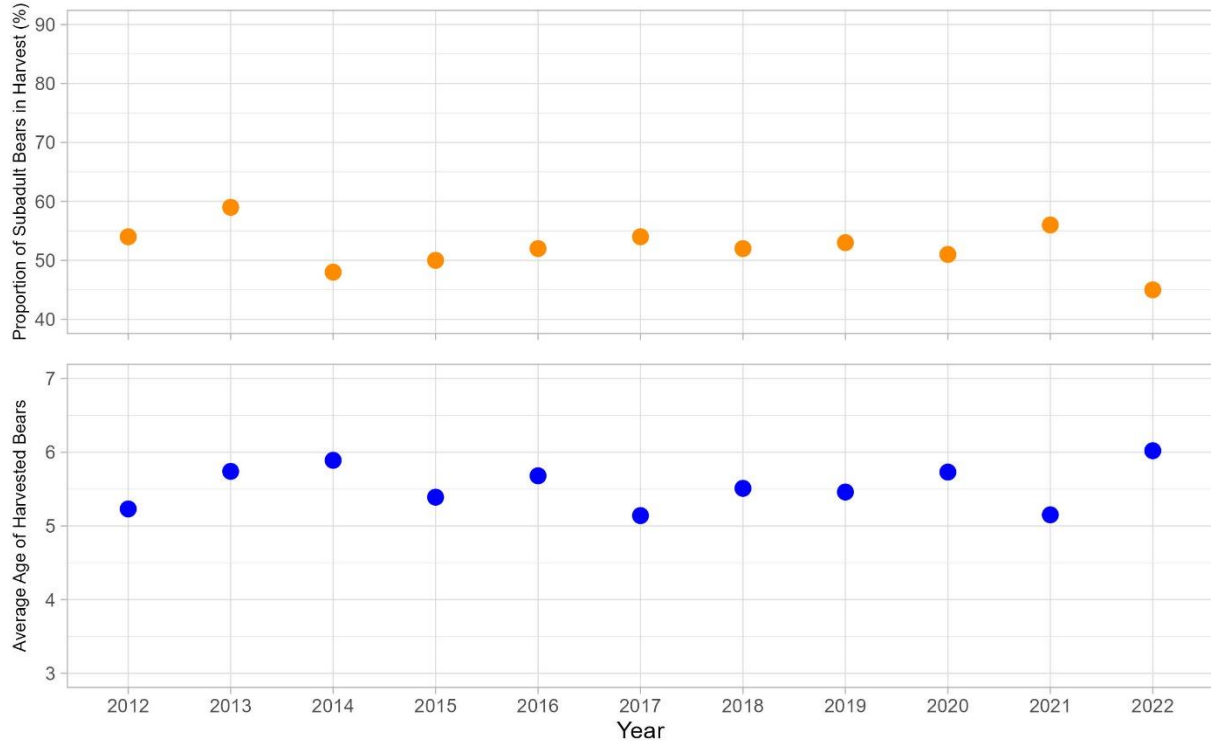Baldwin, R. A., and L. C. Bender. 2009. Foods and nutritional components of diets of black bear in Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado. Canadian Journal of Zoology 87(11): 1000-1008.

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APPENDIX 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF 2024 BLACK BEAR HUNTER OPINION SURVEY RESULTS AND COPY OF SURVEY

On February 12, 2024, the Department distributed survey invitations to ~32,000 user emails from a target population of black bear hunters based on purchases of a black bear tag, bear bait permit, hound hunter permit, or sportsman package from 2021 to 2023 (both residents and non-residents). At the end of the survey effort on March 30, 2024 a total of 4,943 usable responses were received (Table 1).

Overall: Key Findings and Takeaways:

- Black bear hunting experience in Idaho indicates a slight bimodal distribution skewed towards less experience (1-5 years); most respondents have hunted black bears in Idaho for 5 years or less (52%) with the remaining indicating 6 years or more (48%).
- Commitment to bear hunting averaged 2.4 on a scale of 1 (casual) to 5 (committed).
  - Sportsman package tag holders averaged the lowest commitment score (2.0) and bear baiters the highest commitment score (3.7).
- Frequency of black bear hunting in Idaho was distributed fairly equally among user types.
  - Hound hunters and bear baiters indicated they are user groups most likely to hunt black bears every year; sportsman package tag holders were more likely to hunt black bears in Idaho only occasionally or opportunistically.
- Harvest success indicates most hunters (79%) harvest a black bear only 0-25% of the years they hunt.
  - Nonresidents and bear baiters report more frequent harvest; only 61% of nonresidents and 51% of bear baiters responding that they harvest 0-25% of year.
- Season preference consistently ranked "both" as the preferred black bear season structure; in terms of single season ranking, spring ranked higher than fall.
  - Unit preferences ranked GMUs 1, 39, and 4 as the most preferred in Idaho; the least preferred units were located in southern and southeast Idaho.
- Satisfaction, overall, was relatively high (4.7) on a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 6 (very satisfied).
  - All satisfaction metrics averaged 4.1 or higher; the highest satisfaction scores were associated with "methods of take" (5.0) and "black bear regulations" (4.8) while the lowest score was associated with the "length of dog training season" (4.1).
- Importance of various factors used to decide on hunting black bear in Idaho indicated more variation:
  - The highest importance factors were "opportunity to hunt in units I am familiar with" (4.2) and "being able to hunt black bears every year" (4.2), on a scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (extremely important).
  - The lowest importance factors were "opportunity to hunt in units I can avoid bait sites" (2.3) and "the availability of a dog training season" (2.6).
  - Among all user groups, each scored "being able to hunt black bears every year" as the most important factor (range 4.1 to 4.6).

- Restrictions to manage for <u>more bears</u> in <u>some units</u> indicate hunters were evenly split in terms of their willingness to accept additional seasonal restrictions; 35% responded "no or probably not", 38% "maybe or yes", and 26% were "unsure or needed more information".
    - Restrictions to manage for <u>bigger bears</u> in <u>some units</u> were similar; 37% responded "no or probably not," 41% "maybe or yes," and 22% were "unsure or needed more information".
- Restrictions to manage for <u>more bears</u> in the <u>units they hunt</u> indicate a shift towards "no or probably not" (44%), with 35% responding "maybe or yes" and 20% "unsure or needed more information".
    - Restrictions to manage for <u>bigger bears</u> in the <u>units they hunt</u>, 44% responded "no or probably not", 36% "maybe or yes", and 19% "unsure or needed more information".
- Travel preferences indicate a majority (52%) of hunters would travel 0-100 miles to hunt in areas managed for more or bigger bears, which was consistent across all hunter types.
- A total of 2,961 (Q25: "what types of questions might you accept to manage for more or bigger bears") and 2,031 written comments (Q27: "please provide any additional input you'd like to share") were received and reflect similar themes: "don't make changes", "implement more controlled hunts", "restrict nonresident bear hunters", "shorten seasons", and "separate seasons by hunting method".
    - Additional themes varied by user group; for example, all groups except hound hunters suggested restricting hound hunting whereas bear tag and sportsman package tag suggested restricting baiting.

Overall, hunter responses indicate satisfaction with current bear management in Idaho. Hunters specifically appreciate having a variety of methods of take, both spring and fall seasons, and annual hunting opportunities for black bears. There is some evidence that hunters are interested in reducing crowding, evidenced by free response themes of restricting non-resident bear hunters, separating seasons by hunting methods, and implementing more controlled hunts. Similarly, there is some evidence that hunters would be interested in creating some special, or different, bear hunting opportunities in the state. However, more information is needed to assess what specific restrictions hunters would accept either to manage for reduced crowding or for bigger or more bears.

Table 1
Summary of survey response (unweighted data).

Group	Sample size	Useable responses	Response rate
Bear Tag	9987	2517	25%
Sportsman Package Only	9986	2258	23%
Bait Permit	6504	668	10%
Hound Hunter Permit	5686	377	7%

Table 2
Summary of respondents by IDFG administrative region and black bear hunter type (weighted data).

	n	%	Bait Permit	Sportsman Only	Bear Tag	Hound Hunter Permit
Panhandle	1240	25%	22%	30%	19%	26%
Clearwater	680	14%	19%	16%	9%	19%
Southwest	1666	33%	27%	29%	40%	26%
Magic Valley	360	7%	6%	6%	9%	7%

Southeast	435	9%	9%	9%	8%	13%
Upper Snake	505	10%	12%	8%	12%	7%
Salmon	115	2%	4%	2%	2%	2%
Residents	5001	—	—	—	—	—
Nonresidents	819	14%	44%	19%	10%	—
Total	5820	—	—	—	—	—

Table 3

Summary of respondents by black bear hunter types within each IDFG administrative region (weighted data).

	n	Total	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	NR
Bear Tag	2517	43%	31%	27%	49%	52%	37%	49%	40%	36%
Sportsman Package Only	2258	39%	55%	54%	40%	35%	45%	37%	39%	—
Bait Permit	668	12%	7%	11%	6%	7%	8%	9%	14%	59%
Hound Hunter Permit	377	7%	7%	9%	5%	7%	10%	4%	7%	5%

2024 Black Bear Hunter Opinion Survey:

Introduction:

The following questions ask about your experiences, satisfaction, and preferences for black bear hunting in Idaho. Your responses will help guide development of the 2025-2030 Idaho Black Bear Management Plan.

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (Department) has no preconceived ideas or plans for significant changes to statewide black bear management philosophy or hunting opportunities as part of this management plan. However, because it has been over 20 years since we have revised this plan, it is important for us to learn if hunters are satisfied with current management and hunting opportunities or if there are different types of opportunities hunters would like the Department to consider.

Please remember that this survey will help inform the development of the management plan and enhance the Department's understanding of sportsmen's current desires relative to black bear management. No specific changes will be made to black bear seasons in any unit based solely on the results of this survey. As development of the management plan progresses, there will be additional opportunities for you to review and provide input to the Department regarding its content. Public comment is also a vital part of any season setting process the Department undergoes and there will be continued opportunities to provide additional comment on any proposed season changes during those times. Survey participants are encouraged to participate in future black bear season setting public comment periods.

Thank you for helping guide black bear management in Idaho by providing your responses to the following questions!

Section 1

1. How many **YEARS** have you hunted black bears in Idaho?

    ○ 1-5 years
    ○ 6-10 year
    ○ 11-15 years
    ○ 16-20 years
    ○ 20+ years
    ○ I have never hunted bears in Idaho Thank you, you have finished the survey.

2. On a scale of 1-5 — 1 being <u>casual</u> to 5 being <u>committed</u> — how would you **CLASSIFY YOURSELF** as a black bear hunter in Idaho? *Please circle your answer.*

    Casual   1   2   3   4   5   Committed

3. In general, how **OFTEN** do you hunt specifically for black bears in Idaho?

    ○ Every year
    ○ Most years
    ○ Occasionally
    ○ Rarely
    ○ Only opportunistically (I hunt black bear while hunting other species)

4. Since you have been hunting black bears in Idaho, how **OFTEN** would you say you <u>harvest</u> a black bear?

    ○ 0%-25% of the years I hunt
    ○ 25%-50% of the years I hunt
    ○ 50%-75% of the years I hunt
    ○ 75%-100% of the years I hunt

Section 2:

5. Did you **HUNT** black bears in Idaho during **2023**?

    ○ No   ➔ ➔ ➔   If no, <u>skip</u> to **Page# 4, Section #3, Question #19**
    ○ Yes

6. What **SEASON** did you hunt in 2023?

    ○ Spring 2023   ○ Fall 2023   ○ Both seasons
    ⬇   ⬇   ⬇

Answer only   *Answer only*   *Answer all*
Questions 7-12   **Questions 13-18**   **Questions 7-18**

Spring 2023 Season

7. During the <u>Spring 2023</u> season, what **METHOD(S)** did you use to hunt black bears in Idaho? *Please select ALL that apply.*

☐ Spot and Stalk   ☐ Hound   ☐ Bait

☐ While hunting other species ☐ Predator call   ☐ Hound off bait

8. During the <u>Spring 2023</u> season, **HOW MANY DAYS** did you hunt black bear in Idaho?

Spring 2023 season: _____ days

9. During the <u>Spring 2023</u> season, in which **UNIT(S)** did you hunt black bears? Please list up to twelve (12) units that you hunted in Spring 2023. *See map of Idaho and game management units on last page of questionnaire.*

Unit: _____   Unit: _____   Unit: _____   Unit: _____

Unit: _____   Unit: _____   Unit: _____   Unit: _____

10. Did you **HARVEST** a black bear in Idaho during the <u>Spring 2023</u> season?

○ No   ➔ ➔ ➔ If no, <u>skip</u> to **If hunted in the FALL skip to <u>Question 13</u>.**

If you did NOT hunt in the FALL skip to Page# 4, Section #3, Question #19

○ Yes

11. During the <u>Spring 2023</u> season, what **METHOD** did you use to **<u>harvest</u>** a black bear in Idaho? *Please select only ONE.*

○ Spot and Stalk   ○ Hound   ○ Bait

○ While hunting other species   ○ Predator call   ○ Hound off bait

12. During the <u>Spring 2023</u> season, in which **UNIT** did you harvest a black bear in Idaho? Please list the unit that you harvested in Spring 2023. *See map of Idaho and game management units on last page of questionnaire.*

Unit: _____

Fall 2023 Season

13. During the <u>Fall 2023</u> season, what **METHOD(S)** did you use to hunt black bears in Idaho? *Please select all that apply.*

☐ Spot and Stalk   ☐ Hound   ☐ Bait

☐ While hunting other species   ☐ Predator call   ☐ Hound off bait

14. During the <u>Fall 2023</u> season, **HOW MANY DAYS** did you hunt black bear in Idaho?

Fall 2023 season: _____ days

15. During the <u>Fall 2023</u> season, in which **UNIT(S)** did you hunt black bears? Please list up to twelve (12) units that you hunted in Fall 2023. *See map of Idaho and game management units on last page of questionnaire.*

Unit: _____   Unit: _____   Unit: _____   Unit: _____

Unit: _____   Unit: _____   Unit: _____   Unit: _____

16. Did you **HARVEST** a black bear in Idaho during the <u>Fall 2023</u> season?

○ No   ➔ ➔ ➔ If no, **skip** to **Page# 4, Section #3, Question #19**

○ Yes

17. During the <u>Fall 2023</u> season, what **METHOD** did you use to **<u>harvest</u>** a black bear in Idaho? *Please select only ONE.*

○ Spot and Stalk   ○ Hound   ○ Bait

○ While hunting other species   ○ Predator call   ○ Hound off bait

18. During the <u>Fall 2023</u> season, in which **UNIT** did you harvest a black bear in Idaho? Please list the unit that you harvested in Fall 2023. *See map of Idaho and game management units on last page of questionnaire*.

Unit: _____

Section 3:

19. In general, do you **PREFER** to hunt black bear in the fall, spring, or both seasons in Idaho? *Rank your season preference by entering 1, 2, and 3, with 1 being your most preferred.*

☐ Spring   ☐ Fall   ☐ Both

20. Please list your three (3) **MOST PREFERRED** (favorite) units to hunt black bear in Idaho. *See map of Idaho and game management units on last page of questionnaire.*

Most preferred unit: **Second most preferred unit:**   **Third most preferred unit:**

_____   _____   _____

21. In general, how **SATISFIED** are you with the following in terms of black bear hunting in Idaho?

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Slightly Dissatisfied	Slightly Satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	No opinion
Your overall black bear hunting experience	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The black bear hunting regulations	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The number of black bears	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The size of black bears	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The methods of take available	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The length of Spring black bear season	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The length of Fall black bear season	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The dates of Spring black bear season	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The dates of Fall black bear season	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Access to your preferred hunting unit	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The length of dog training season	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your 2023 black bear hunting experience	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

22. Please tell us **HOW IMPORTANT** each of the following factors is in your decision to hunt black bears in Idaho:

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Very Important	Extremely important	No opinion
Opportunity to hunt black bear with hounds	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opportunity to bait black bear	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opportunity to hunt in units close to my home	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opportunity to hunt in units I am familiar with	○	○	○	○	○	○
Being able to hunt black bears every year	○	○	○	○	○	○
Being able to hunt black bears in both the Spring and Fall each year	○	○	○	○	○	○
The number of black bears	○	○	○	○	○	○
The size of black bears	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opportunity to hunt in units where I can avoid hound hunters	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opportunity to hunt in units where I can avoid bait sites	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opportunity to hunt in units where I can avoid other hunters	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ability to assist with predator management	○	○	○	○	○	○
The availability of a dog training season	○	○	○	○	○	○
Access to units with motorized access	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Very Important	Extremely important	No opinion
Access to units with limited motorized access	○	○	○	○	○	○

Section 4:

Introduction:

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game wants to understand whether hunters are interested in different black bear opportunities in the state. This would likely require implementing additional restrictions. For instance, it may be possible to manage for more bears or bigger bears in select units, but doing this might require shortening seasons, implementing controlled hunts, or considering other ways to reduce hunter numbers and/or bear harvest.

Please indicate your willingness to accept additional restrictions to manage for more **or** bigger bears. Your responses to these questions will help us understand whether there is public interest in having the Department evaluate management changes during the timeframe of this management plan (2025-2030). No changes to management will be made solely from responses to these questions. Any future proposals to <u>implement</u> restrictions (including specifics about what units, which restrictions, etc.) would be scoped with the public through season setting processes. We encourage you to participate in all future public comment periods related to black bear management.

In this question we would like to know about your general willingness to accept additional restrictions to manage for more or bigger bears in some units.

23.

	No	Probably not	Unsure/ need more info	Maybe	Yes
Would you support additional restrictions in select units to manage for **more bears**?	○	○	○	○	○
Would you support additional restrictions in select units to manage for **bigger bears**?	○	○	○	○	○

In this question we would like to know about your willingness to accept additional restrictions in order to manage for more or bigger bears specifically in the UNITS WHERE YOU HUNT for bears.

24.

	No	Probably not	Unsure/ need more info	Maybe	Yes
Would you support additional restrictions in **YOUR PREFERRED HUNTING UNITS** to manage for **more bears**?	○	○	○	○	○
Would you support additional restrictions in **YOUR PREFERRED HUNTING UNITS** to manage for **bigger bears**?	○	○	○	○	○

25. Please tell us what kinds of restrictions (for example: controlled hunts, shorten or eliminate spring or fall seasons, restrict method of take during some seasons) you might accept to manage for more or bigger bears in units you hunt. No response is needed if you have already indicated that you do not want to manage for more or bigger bears.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

26. How far would you **TRAVEL** to hunt in an area managed for **more or bigger bears**?
- ○ 0 - 100 miles
- ○ 100 - 200 miles
- ○ 200 - 300 miles
- ○ More than 300 miles

27. Please provide any additional input you'd like to share on black bear management.

_____

_____

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28. If you would like to receive notification of when the 2025-2030 Black Bear Management Plan is available for public comment, please provide your email address.

_____

Thank you for completing the 2024 Black Bear Hunter Opinion Survey!

A complete report on survey responses will be published and common themes discussed as part of the black bear management plan.

APPENDIX 2. Idaho Wildlife Public Safety Policy W-3.0

This policy is intended to provide guidance, flexibility, and appropriate discretion to Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) personnel in managing wildlife involved in human safety, depredation on livestock and domestic animals, and public nuisance situations. Because of the variables involved response to any given wildlife/human conflict may be considered unique circumstances of the particular interaction.

In implementing Idaho's Wildlife Policy to preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage wildlife and provide for continued supplies of wildlife for hunting, fishing, and trapping. IDFG attempts to address conflicts between wildlife and people in a way that balances the interests of public safety, public use, private property, and wildlife. Even so, it is inherent in Idaho's Wildlife Policy, with the presence of both people and wildlife on the landscape and the "wildness" of wildlife that IDFG cannot prevent all potential or actual wildlife-human conflict.

IDFG categorizes wildlife-human conflicts based on human injury and the behavior of the wildlife involved (see attached chart). IDFG will provide guidelines to its personnel for addressing situations involving human injuries or fatalities caused by wildlife attacks on livestock and domestic animals, and nuisance behavior.

For incidents involving serious bodily injury or death of a person, the Wildlife-Human Attack Response Team (WHART) will be activated and respond consistent with WHART Guidelines and Procedures. The WHART's responsibilities include acting to protect the safety of the public and incident responders; attempting to identify, locate, and control the animal(s) involved in the incident; and conducting, documenting and reporting investigative findings.

IDFG's intent is to provide timely and appropriate response to wildlife-human conflicts, particularly attacks on humans, human safety threats, and loss of domestic animals. IDFG may take appropriate measures to control wildlife, up to and including lethal control, in such situations. Control measures will be conducted as safely and humanely as practicable under the circumstances. IDFG may also promote preventative measures to reduce such conflicts.

Nothing herein shall be construed as waiving or modifying discretionary function liability protections or other immunities for the State contained in the Idaho Tort Claims Act, Idaho Code Section 6-901 *et seq.*

Related legal authorities:

A. The U.S. and Idaho Constitutions support a right of reasonable defense of human life.

B. Actions involving species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) are regulated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and any "take" of ESA-listed species must be consistent with federal law and regulations.

C. Idaho Code §36-1107 allows livestock and domestic animal owners to control, without advance permission from IDFG, black bear, mountain lion, wolves, grizzly bears (when not protected by the federal endangered species act) and predators when the same are molesting or attacking livestock. (Where the same are not molesting or attacking livestock, an IDFG permit must be obtained for a private individual to take a control action.) IDFG has responsibilities for control of certain property damage by wildlife as specified by Idaho Code§§ 36-1107 through 36-111O.

2
IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

Idaho Wildlife Public Safety

POLICY NO.: W 3.0

Category of Conflicts and Response Actions

	On-scene Response	Post-Incident Review	Authorization of Control Action	Other	WC-1 Form
Category (Red) Wildlife has caused serious physical human injury or death (Animal has been killed or remains at large)	✓ WHART GUIDELINES	✓ WHAAT GUIDELINES	**Killing** of animal without additional authorization if imminent threat to human safety; USFWS authorization needed for non-imminent threats by ESA-listed animals, IDFG DO/AS authorization for other non-imminent threats	Law enforcement investigation if claim protected animal killed in defense of human life/property (Refer to USFWS if listed species)	✓
Category [Orange] Wildlife has caused minor/no human injury AND involved animal has been killed/captured		✓ WHART GUIDELINES	Handling of captured animal per USFWS authorization for ESA-listed animals or per IDFG authorization for non- listed animals.	Law enforcement investigation if claim protected animal killed in defense of human life/ property (Refer to USFWS if listed species)	✓
Category [Yellow] Wildlife is at large and: • Demonstrates aggressive behavior toward humans or otherwise poses significant risk to human safety • **Has killed** Livestock and/or domestic animals • Poses public nuisance			USFWS authorization needed for ESA-listed animals and IDFG Director/RS authorization needed for other species, unless response to imminent threat to human safety, or unless response to threat to property as authorized under Idaho law Orphaned, Injured and Problem Wildlife Guidelines	Report attack or molesting of domestic animals to USDA-WS	✓
Category {Green} Report of wildlife activity NOT involving aggressive or problem behavior				Forward report to regional staff; if multiple sightings, **assess** for Category _[Yellow]	

Wildlife Human Attack Response Team (WHART) Guidelines

Coordination

1. State coordinator (1) -Assistant Chief - Enforcement:
    a. Coordinate state training events and policy/guideline review/revision as needed
    b. Coordinate an annual coordinators meeting and table top exercise
    c. Coordinate a large scale training as required (high attrition)

2. Regional Coordinators (7); Appointed by Regional Supervisor (RS):
    a. Coordinate regional training and maintain documentation
    b. Develop, maintain, distribute regional contact roster for WHART response

Role (Note: The local Sheriff has the authority for public safety and we assist at their request)

1. Respond to wildlife attacks involving humans
2. Investigate incident, gather evidence, and report findings
3. Coordinate with local authorities

Composition

1. IDFG Policy W-3.0
    a. Designated WHART Teams will consist of: Conservation Officer, Wildlife Biologist, Regional Conservation Educator/Public Information Officer (Note: It is recognized that not all WHART members may be available to respond to any given incident and other personnel may be involved due to their knowledge, talents and location, but all designated WHART team members will have the minimum WHART training.)
    b. Additional members at RS discretion
2. Operate under the direction of the Regional Supervisor in the region the incident occurs

Pre-Incident Outreach

1. Communicate and coordinate with sheriffs and other appropriate officials prior to an incident (e.g. EMTs, Search & Rescue, Hospitals, Coroners, USPS, BLM, etc.)
2. Provide information to first responders about safety concerns and evidence preservation at wildlife incident scenes
3. Provide EMTs, coroners, and hospitals with information about evidence collection

On Scene Response Priorities

1. Ensure public safety and team safety
2. Notify local law enforcement and establish Incident Command authority
3. Notify appropriate land management agency
4. Secure the scene
5. Collect evidence and information from victim as appropriate
6. Document and gather evidence at the scene
7. Report findings to the Regional Supervisor (or designee)
8. Coordinate information dissemination to internal staff and
   media (refer to policy C-3.0 Sensitive Issues)

Post-Incident Review

1. Conduct debriefing-formal review with participants to identify lessons learned and what actions can be sustained and/or improved
2. Coordinate dissemination of lessons learned to internal staff

Training

1. WHART training may include both classroom and scenario components
2. WHART members will have minimum training described below, but non-WHART members may be assigned a task(s) they have been trained to do or have some experience doing
3. Minimum training for **ALL** designated WHART Team members:
   a. IS 1OO.b & IS 200.b (FEMA Emergency Management Institute courses; IS 100 is a prerequisite to IS 200)
   b. First aid and CPR certification
   c. Evidence collection (power point)
4. Specialty skills training for anyone assigned to use a firearm or pharmaceutical agent a. Firearms (IDFG Policy E-3.0)
   b. Pharmaceutical agents/chemical restraint (IDFG Policy W-2.0) i.. Safety training
   c. QC/Pepper spray (Follow manufacturer's instructions)
5. Annually Review:
   a. Membership, policy, procedures, communication systems, kits and supplies, evidence collection/submission/storage

Guidelines for Responding to Orphaned, Injured and Problem Wildlife

These guidelines have been developed to provide consistent direction and support to Idaho Department of Fish and Game employees when dealing with Orphaned, Injured, or Problem Wildlife. They are also intended to explain the rationale for decisions made by IDFG personnel. Potential threats to public safety, which can be caused by habituation to humans, disease, genetics, or other factors, must be considered when making difficult decisions about what to do with Orphaned, Injured, or Problem Wildlife.

I. Background

The mission of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (36-103) includes: all wildlife shall be preserved, protected, perpetuated, and managed for citizens to provide for continued supplies for hunting, fishing and trapping. This mission requires the Department to focus resources on managing populations rather than on individual animals.

It can be difficult for people to watch an animal experience protracted illness, injury, starvation, or death, especially when young animals are involved. There are also times when individual animals have undesirable interactions with humans prompting the Department to respond as a matter of public service or public safety. In both cases, members of the public may become emotionally invested, resulting in direct involvement or active following of the case of an individual animal. As a profession that also cares for wild animals, we share in the public's compassion. During those times when Department staff responds as a matter of public service or public safety to an individual animal, we will remain cognizant of public sentiment as we focus on our primary responsibility.

II. Decision Framework

Idaho Code 36-106(e) (5) provides broad discretion for the agency to evaluate the circumstances of each situation and make decisions regarding the take of wildlife "in the interest of fish and game resources of the state."

The Director has delegated authority regarding disposition of orphaned, sick, or injured animals to Regional Supervisors, Bureau Chiefs and their designees. Legal requirements also need to be considered *(e.g.,* Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, state restrictions on certain species to avoid disease transmission *(e.g.,* Idaho Code 25-236 restricting possession of skunk, raccoon, and fox; ISDA brucellosis rules), and damage control and compensation programs under Idaho Code 36-1107 to 36-1110)).

As a matter of standard operating procedure, the Department will respond to Injured, Orphaned, or Problem wildlife based on level of concern for public safety or private property damage. When incidences occur with little risk to human safety or private property damage, Department efforts will focus on providing technical assistance designed to change behavior of the animal, without need for intrusive intervention and removal of the animals. Wildlife creating a concern for public safety or private property damage, and under the jurisdiction of the Department, should receive active intervention.

III. Definitions

An "orphaned" animal is dependent on parental care, but for which parental care is no longer being provided as a result of death or abandonment.

An "injured" animal is incapable of functioning normally due to physical injury or illness.

A "problem" animal poses a threat to human health or safety, or causes or is about to cause damage to private property (except for grazing damage by antelope, elk, deer or moose; *see* Idaho Code 36-1107(a)).

IV. Factors to consider when considering Intervention options may include, but are not limited to:

- Conservation management value of the individual animal, including consistency with management objectives described in:
    - o   Species Management Plan
    - o   Predation Management Plan
    - o   State Wildlife Action Plan
    - o   Interagency Agreement *(e.g.,* 2016 Conservation Strategy for Greater Yellowstone Grizzly Bear)
- In cases of disease, potential effects to wildlife populations, livestock, domestic animals or humans.
- Probability of the animal to be successfully rehabilitated or relocated, such that it can contribute to the population in the wild.
- Availability of appropriate rehabilitation facilities.
- Future risks to public safety or property, or other conflict with humans.
- Condition of the animal.
- Diversion of agency personnel/fiscal resources from other conservation management/benefit.
- Social concerns *(e.g.,* heightened human emotion to dispatch or relocation of animal).

V. General options

- **Indirect Intervention**

    -To be used where there is little risk to human safety or damage to private property, and there are not extenuating social issues

    -Provide technical assistance to alter behavior of the animal so that intervention is no longer required

    -Do not intervene, allowing the greatest chance of natural processes and biological functions to operate

- **Direct Intervention**

  -Humane dispatch *(e.g.,* firearm, chemical euthanasia, or other methods appropriate for animal's location, public safety considerations, and other relevant factors [see *American Veterinary Medical Association* **(AVMA)** *Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals: 2013 Edition,* Sl.6 *Free-Ranging Wildlife]).*

  -Limited rehabilitation for release back into the wild (confinement for short-term observation/limited intervention)

  -Veterinary treatment prior to rehabilitation and release back to the wild
  -Rehabilitation at authorized facility for release back into the wild

  -Transfer to captivity at Association of Zoos and Aquariums **(A2A)** accredited facility or other captive wildlife facility authorized by Regional Supervisor, Bureau Chief, or IDFG veterinarian

  -Relocation/release (animal remains in the wild)

To avoid diversion of agency resources from other conservation/management purposes, IDFG will not accept financial responsibility for private veterinary treatment or rehabilitation, or the transfer out of a wild population without prior approval of a Regional Supervisor, Bureau Chief, or Director's Office.

VI. Big Game Animals

IDFG will generally not consider big game animals for rehabilitation. Edible game meat from otherwise healthy game animals may be salvaged when practical.

Relocation/release of black bear, mountain lion or gray wolf should only occur if there is a demonstrated management or conservation need. IDFG may consider transferring big game animals out of the wild when an A2A-accredited zoo or appropriate captive wildlife facility is willing and financially able to take the animal, and such transfer is practical. The receiving facility should have a conservation and management mission consistent with the Department. Response to situations involving grizzly bear will be consistent with applicable management documents.

VII.Public Outreach

The decision maker should consult with their Regional Supervisor, Regional Communications Manager, or Bureau of Communications personnel to determine what, if any public outreach is appropriate to explain why a decision is/was made.