

Weiser Black Bear Working Group

Recommendations and Final Report



July 8, 2020

Background

Black bear management and hunting season structures in GMUs 22, 31, 32, and 32A have differed from those across most of Idaho for 25+ years. Beginning in 1993, black bear hunting in these units has been managed exclusively through controlled hunts. Bait has never been permitted in these units, and hound hunting has only been allowed during a portion of fall hunts. This structure was intended to maintain a lightly hunted bear population, resulting in high bear numbers and higher-quality bear hunting opportunities in these units. Though tag numbers and season dates have been adjusted several times since 1993, the basic structure has remained the same (Table 1).

However, this management structure has resulted in unintended consequences for residents of these GMUs. Conservative harvest levels have created an elevated bear population and conflicts have increased where private lands are more abundant. Bear depredation and nuisance complaints have increased through time, and residents have expressed increasing frustration that they have few tools to directly address these issues. IDFG has issued kill permits, hazed bears, and directed hunters towards nuisance issues, but bear conflicts have continued to increase while general social acceptance of high bear populations has continued to decrease.

The Weiser Black Bear Working Group was initiated during the 2019 Big Game Season Setting process. During that process, IDFG staff developed and presented proposals for changes to hunting seasons that were intended to provide additional tools for resolving black bear conflicts in Units 22, 31, 32 and 32A while still maintaining quality bear hunting opportunities. However, these proposals were contentious among different interest groups interested in black bear management in this area. Several groups indicated dissatisfaction with current management in the area and expressed a desire to work toward different solutions.

Because of the differing values and contention exposed during the season setting process, IDFG Southwest Regional Commissioner Tim Murphy convened a working group with representatives from key groups with an interest in black bear management in Weiser-area units. The intent of the group was to review data and discuss goals and opinions, and to develop consensus-based recommendations that met group goals. Recommendations were intended to fall into three categories: 1) proposed changes to hunting seasons that were consistent with IDFG's Black Bear Management Plan; 2) proposed changes to the Black Bear Management Plan that would be forwarded to a future management plan review team; and 3) changes that would require legislative action.

WBBWG Membership and Meetings

The following individuals participated in the Weiser Black Bear Working Group:

Wayne Cada – Midvale resident, hunter, and rancher
Ryan Hatfield – Council resident and hunter
Charley Kindall – Cambridge resident, hunter, and beekeeper
Frank Schwartz – Cambridge resident and rancher
Tad Sherman - Past President, Idaho State Bowhunters
Tyler Strickland – Board Member, Idaho Houndsmen Association
Tim Murphy – IDFG Southwest Region Commissioner
Brad Compton – IDFG Southwest Regional Supervisor
Regan Berkley – IDFG Southwest Regional Wildlife Manager

The group met monthly six times between December, 2019 and May 2020.

Group Goals

During the first two meetings, the group developed shared goals for bear management in the Weiser River units:

- Maintain a healthy/viable bear population where they are not causing problems.
- Reduce or eliminate private land and human conflict caused by bears.
- Provide a diversity of bear hunting opportunity distributed throughout the state.
- Keep regulations simple.

Group Recommendations

Over the course of the last four meetings, the group developed two types of recommendations: 1) recommendations that would be included as proposals during the 2021/2022 season-setting process and which are consistent with the current IDFG Black Bear Management Plan, and 2) additional recommendations that would be considered during a future revision of the Black Bear Management Plan.

2021/2022 Season Setting Recommendations

The group recommends moving away from a strictly controlled hunt structure in these units, in order to meet the goal of reducing or eliminating private land and human conflict caused by bears. In addition, the group recommends allowing additional methods of take (bait, hounds) during seasons currently closed to those methods, to provide additional tools to landowners.

To meet the goal of maintaining healthy/viable bear populations where they are not causing problems, general hunts would be focused on and near private lands. Most public lands would continue to have controlled hunting opportunities, to allow take by hunters who are unable to gain access to private lands. The controlled hunt structure on public lands would also provide some security for bears not involved in human conflicts.

Specific seasons recommended by the group are displayed in regulations format in Figure 1.

Bear Management Plan Revision Recommendations

The group recommends evaluating the potential for better redistributing quality bear management across the state in other GMUs during the next revision of the Black Bear Management Plan. This would maintain the opportunity for quality bear hunting in the state, but redistribute the potential consequences of lightly hunted bear populations instead of concentrating them in only one area. Across several meetings, the group indicated that several characteristics should be considered when evaluating the potential for other GMUs to provide a quality black bear hunting experience:

- Road densities
- Habitat quality and distribution across the GMU
- Current predator management plans or needs
- Other species' management structure (e.g. Grizzly bear management)
- Local citizen acceptance

Table 1. Summary of Bear Management and Hunt Structure changes in Game Management Units 22, 31, 32 and 32A.

Year	Structure	Reason for Change (if known)
Pre-1993	General hunts, Sept 15-Oct 15 only, bait prohibited, portion of 32A closed	
1993	Controlled hunts only. Sept 1-30, bait prohibited, 30 tags each hunt. April 15-May 15, bait and dogs prohibited, 30 tags each hunt.	Per 1999-2010 Black Bear Management Plan: "High vulnerability of bears to hunting in this DAU. Bear seasons became increasingly more conservative in each of the last 3 management plans."
1995-1997	Portion of 32A closed to dog training.	Bear research was occurring in Middle Fork and Little Weiser drainages; they were closed to avoid conflicts with dogs.
1997	Tag increase in spring hunts to 50 tags each.	Unknown
2000	Fall hunts extended to Sept 1 – Oct 31, dogs prohibited Oct 1 – 31. Tag increase in fall hunts to 50 tags each.	Unknown
2001	Spring hunts extended to April 15-May 22.	Unknown
2003	All spring and fall hunt tag numbers increased to 75 tags each.	Per 2003 proposals memo: "The black bear population in these units has been meeting objectives and can sustain additional harvest."
2004	Spring hunts extended to April 1 – May 22.	Unknown
2011	Tag increase in fall hunts to 100 tags each.	Unknown
2014	Fall hunts extended to Aug 15 – 31, private land only in addition to Sep 1 – Oct 31 dates.	Per 2014 proposals memo: "To address depredation concerns."
2015	Add 25 tag fall youth hunt in Units 22 and 31, same dates and restrictions as existing fall hunt.	Many bear problems caused in fall by younger/smaller bears on private land. Youth may be more willing to take such bears, and landowners may be more willing to allow youth hunters.
2019	Spring: Split units 32 (200 tags) and 32A (40 tags) into 2 hunts. Add youth only controlled hunt (dogs allowed) in Unit 32 May 23 – Jun 15. Fall: Split units 22 (100 tags) and 31 (50 tags) into 2 hunts. Shorten fall controlled hunts to Sep 1 – Oct 31. Add 100-tag private land only controlled hunt (dogs allowed) in unit 22, Aug 1 – Sep 30.	Create hunt/additional tags to address private land bear problems in late summer/early fall. Provide additional tags and opportunity throughout fall to address problem bears. In spring, provide additional tags and opportunity to address problem bears and provide locals more opportunity to draw tags and harvest bears. Youth hunt because youth may be more willing to take smaller/younger problem bears, landowners may be more willing to allow youth to hunt, and timeframe overlaps common problem timeframe.

Figure 1. Detailed recommendation for changes to black bear hunting season structure in GMUs 22, 31, 32 and 32A, for proposal during the 2021/2022 season setting process.

**2021 & 2022 FALL / 2022 & 2023 SPRING
BLACK BEAR HUNTING SEASONS**

2021 & 2022 Fall / 2022 & 2023 Spring Black Bear Seasons (Females with young are protected!)				
Units	Take Season	Dogs Prohibited	Dog Training	Notes
22, 31, 32A	Apr 1 – May 22 Aug 30 – Oct 31	Oct 1 – Oct 31	May 23 - July 31	<i>On or within one mile of private lands.</i>

Fall 2021 & 2022 Black Bear Controlled Hunts (Females with young are protected!)				
Hunt No.	Controlled Hunt Areas	Tags	Season Dates	Notes
8502	22-1 ^a	100	Sep 1 - Oct 31	<i>Dogs prohibited Oct 1 - Oct 31, See note 1, Page 71</i>
8503	32-1 ^a	100	Sep 1 - Oct 31	<i>Dogs prohibited Oct 1 - Oct 31, See note 1, Page 71, Motorized Hunting Rule Applies, See Pages 102 - 104</i>
XXXX	32-2	Unlimited	Sep 1 – Oct 31	<i>Dogs prohibited Oct 1 – Oct 31 Motorized Hunting Rule Applies, See Pages 102 - 104</i>

**Youth only Fall 2021 & 2022 Black Bear Controlled Hunts
(Females with young are protected!)**

Hunt No.	Controlled Hunt Areas	Tags	Season Dates	Notes
8504	22-1 ^a	25	Sep 1 - Oct 31	<i>Dogs prohibited Oct 1 - Oct 31, See note 1, Page 71</i>

**Spring 2022 & 2023 Black Bear Controlled Hunts
(Females with young are protected!)**

Hunt No.	Controlled Hunt Areas	Tags	Season Dates	Notes
8001	22-1 ^a (See pg 72)	75	Apr 1 - May 22	<i>Bait prohibited</i>
8002	32-1 ^a (See pg 72)	75	Apr 1 - May 22	<i>Bait prohibited, Motorized Hunting Rule Applies, See Pages 102 - 104</i>
XXXX	32-2	Unlimited	Apr 1 – May 22	<i>Motorized Hunting Rule Applies, See Pages 102 - 104</i>

Note on Page 71:

Note:

1. Controlled hunt tag holders must have a hound-hunter permit to use dogs in this hunt. Any dogs used must be under the control of the tag holder. Bears may not be pursued during this controlled hunt without having a controlled hunt tag in possession.

BLACK BEAR CONTROLLED HUNT AREA DESCRIPTIONS

Hunt Area 22-1 — All of Units 22 and 31.

Hunt Area 32-1^a — All of Unit 32A and that portion of Unit 32 north of Highway 52 and east of the Sweet-Ola Highway.

Hunt Area 32-2 – That portion of Unit 32 south of Highway 52 and west of the Sweet-Ola Highway.