

In recent years, the Division of Fish, Game, and Wildlife has cooperated with municipalities in northern and central New Jersey, working through situations involving black bears. The Division of Fish, Game, and Wildlife policy concerning these animals and the services which are affected is as follows:

If a bear is sighted in Mount Olive or any municipality, it should not be harassed or pursued. No attempt should be made to capture or kill the animal, if it poses no immediate threat to life or property. Such actions could create potential danger to the public.

Black bears are capable of covering great distances and often move during the evening hours. Unless they are bothered or chased, bears in areas with which they are unfamiliar will choose to remain inactive during the day. More often than not, a bear that wanders into a suburban or urban area will leave the area under cover of darkness.

Some bears do, however, get into situations where physical removal becomes necessary. In those situations, the Division of Fish, Game, and Wildlife has personnel and equipment available to effectively and safely carry out the removal of the animal.

Under no circumstances shall the local animal control officer or personnel attempt to capture or immobilize a black bear. Any bear sighting which may occur in Mount Olive Township should be reported immediately to our Mount Olive Police Department at (973) 691-0850 or Mount Olive Health Department Animal Control Officer at (973) 691-0900, Extension 7334 for tracking and follow-up notification to the Division of Fish, Game, and Wildlife.

To obtain further information about black bears, you may contact Principal Wildlife Biologist, Patrick Carr, at (908) 735-8793 or visit the Division of Fish, Game, and Wildlife
Website: <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw> .

Following are questions and answers concerning bears and bear management in New Jersey.
Information is accurate as of March, 2001.

Q. Who is responsible for managing black bears in New Jersey?

A. The NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife is mandated to protect and manage all wildlife in the state. In fulfillment of this responsibility, the agency is seeking to manage the growing black bear resource while minimizing negative impacts to the human population.

Q. How does the Division view the black bear in New Jersey?

A. The Division believes that black bears are an important part of New Jersey's natural heritage, and a vital component of healthy ecosystems.

Q. What is New Jersey's historical bear population and how has it changed over time?

A. Prior to European settlement, bears were numerous and occurred throughout the entire state. By 1900, settlers had practically eliminated New Jersey's black bears by clearing nearly all the state's forests for lumber, fuel and agriculture, and by killing bears indiscriminately as "vermin". As a result of the protection provided by "game animal" status, population increases in Pennsylvania and New York, and forest maturation providing improved habitat, NJ black bear numbers have been increasing and their range expanding since the 1980s.

Q. Was the black bear always a game animal in New Jersey?

A. No. The Division and the Fish and Game Council have managed black bears as a game animal since 1953. A black bear hunting season for New Jersey was established in 1958.

Q. Weren't black bear numbers kept low in New Jersey through extensive hunting?

A. No. The population remained small throughout most of the 20th century due to limited amounts of suitable habitat. There were legal hunting seasons for black bear in New Jersey only in the years 1958, and 1962 through 1970. The limited hunting season during those 10 years resulted in only 46 bears being harvested, indicating a relatively small population. This prompted the Division, the Fish and Game Council and the sportsmen of New Jersey to close the season in 1971.

Q. How many bears are there in New Jersey today and where do they live?

A. The population estimate for the year 2001 in the primary bear range of Sussex, Warren, Passaic and Morris counties is 1146. The 1997 Black Bear Management Plan identified 942 square miles of bear habitat in these counties; bears currently exist in 2603 square miles across northern New Jersey. In 1995 they were known to occur in 48 municipalities in 12 counties. During the past 5 years their range has been steadily expanding southward and eastward from the northwestern part of the state. Now, black bears have been sighted in all 21 counties.

Q. Is the population estimate based on bear sightings or damage complaints?

A. The Division population estimate is based on 20 years of intensive research information collected by capturing, handling and recording data on over 600 bears. Mark-recapture, radio telemetry and annual

monitoring of denned females with cubs have provided the data on densities, breeding age and productivity, mortality and longevity. This data is collectively used to provide a scientific population estimate.

Q. What is the Division's overall bear management strategy?

A. The Division of Fish and Wildlife's overall integrated bear management strategy includes a public education campaign, black bear research and monitoring, and the aggressive wildlife control measures of aversive conditioning, trapping and removal, and euthanization of bears that pose a public safety threat.

Q. How many complaints about bears does the Division receive? What kinds of problems do bears create?

A. In 1995, the Division's Wildlife Control Unit received 285 complaints about bears. In 2000, the number soared to 1,375 complaints resulting in \$200,000 worth of damage. The types of complaints are expanding in scope as well. Damaging bird feeders and trash cans have been fairly typical in the past, but now livestock and pet kills and home entries are on the rise.

Q. Why is there a problem now?

A. The Division recognizes that this situation has been developing over the course of two decades. It is a complex and dynamic issue affected by numerous factors, including an increase in suitable habitat, abundant food supplies, increasing vehicular traffic, a more urban/suburban population encroaching upon bear habitats and bears expanding their range into areas with denser human populations.

Q. How do people contribute to bear-human problems?

A. Bears that are fed by people (intentionally or unintentionally) are likely to end up in problem situations. The Division urges residents to not feed bears under any circumstances and to "bear- proof" their surroundings to minimize potential conflicts with bears.

Q. What measures has the Division taken to resolve bear-people conflicts?

A. The Division has been conducting an intensive public education campaign to teach residents, hikers, anglers and campers in "bear country" how to successfully coexist with these animals. Efforts include presentations to school children, civic organizations, communities and other groups, as well as the development of an educational video, public service announcements, brochures, signs and other educational materials. The black bear education program was awarded a national award for excellence for 1999.

Q. How does the Division respond to complaints?

A. The Wildlife Control Unit provides advice to callers with minor bear problems and technical assistance to homeowners, beekeepers and agriculturists with serious damage problems. They also actively trap and aversively condition bears responsible for recurring nuisance incidents and euthanize bears that show unyielding or aggressive behavior, or that do not respond to the conditioning process.

Q. Can the Division manage black bear problems solely by expanding the education and aversive conditioning programs?

A. The Division recognizes and is committed to education and aversive conditioning as valuable tools in managing conflicts between bears and people. However, during the period between 1997 and 1999 when the Division was conducting its most intensive education and aversive conditioning activities, damage complaints escalated from 459 to 1,659. The number of damage complaints during this period would certainly have been much higher if the Division was not employing this management. This dramatic increase in conflicts during this period is a clear indication that education and aversive conditioning alone will never reduce conflicts to a level that will be acceptable to the people whose property and safety are affected.

Q. What about other control alternatives such as chemical or surgical sterilization or relocation?

A. Presently there is no FDA approved contraceptive drug available for bears (including SpayVac), and the methodology and effects of surgical sterilization on free ranging bears have not been studied. It would take years of extensive research and field trials to determine if sterilization is even a viable alternative. Even if it were found to be feasible, we would still have the same size population of bears. Relocating bears entails significant expense and it also requires suitable relocation areas. In New Jersey there is limited area in which to relocate bears. Relocating bears to the Pinelands of southern New Jersey, which has been suggested and is a viable option, has met with serious opposition by residents in that region. Also, moving a problem bear from one area to another is not a solution.