

THE PROBLEM

Connecticut's black bears are a critical part of our local ecosystem. Their numbers are small and they are slow to reproduce, making them particularly vulnerable to over-hunting.

In recent years, Connecticut has experienced an increase in reports of black bear sightings and interactions. This has fueled support for legalizing a bear hunt, without first initiating a public education campaign or an updated study into state bear populations (the most recent study was done in 2012).

For the third year in a row, a bill was raised by the Environment Committee to allow bear hunting in the deep woods. Bear hunting will likely increase sightings and interactions because orphaned cubs do not learn necessary foraging and den-building skills from their mothers. As a result, these orphaned bears are more likely to enter suburban areas in search of food.

According to the CT Office of Legislative Research, current state statute already allows farmers on leased or owned land to hunt bears that threaten their property (CGS 26-72), and for the DEEP commissioner to kill a bear if there is a public health or safety threat (CGS 26-3). This makes an expanded hunt unnecessary.

Education-based strategies have been proven to be more effective than hunting at reducing bear-human interactions.



Black bears only reproduce every 2-3 years. Cubs stay with mom for two years and don't begin mating until age 5.

A COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION

Rather than resorting to more hunting, Connecticut should develop a public education and outreach plan. We can humanely reduce conflicts between humans and bears by developing best practices for human-wildlife coexistence.

Community-based education programs should emphasize:

- benefits of black bears;
- removal of attractants (garbage, bird feeders, pet food etc.);
- posting signs on state trails, advising hikers of techniques in case of bear encounters;
- keeping dogs on leashes at all times;
- using a whistle and carrying bear spray while hiking, as bears are naturally shy and will avoid people when possible.

Public education campaigns across the United States have proven to be successful in managing populations and encouraging public participation in conservation efforts.

Black bears are an integral part of our biodiversity. They are necessary to maintaining a healthy ecosystem in Connecticut for generations to come.

FAST FACTS

- **Our bear population is low:** Deforestation in the 1800's dramatically decreased the black bear population. Their population only rebounded in the 1980's. A 2014 study by the UConn Wildlife and Fisheries Conservation Center identified 400 adult bears in Connecticut. According to CT DEEP, the state has a capacity for 2,000 black bears.
- **Hunts increase interactions:** The New Jersey Department of Fish and Wildlife Bear Activity Report shows human-bear conflicts actually increased during the hunts of 2011-2014.
- **Bear populations are self-regulating:** A fertilized egg stops developing in the female bear for nearly 4 months after fertilization. If the female is not able to gain roughly 150 pounds in that time, the pregnancy naturally terminates. The bear population will not grow beyond what the ecosystem can support.
- **Timing is everything:** Nearly all human-bear interactions happen in the fall when bears are going through hyperphagia, the period before hibernation when bears must gain 20-40 pounds a week and are in constant search of food. It is especially important that food attractants like garbage cans, compost bins, bird feeders, etc. be securely stored during this time.
- **Public education works:** In 2014, Yosemite National Park reported a 92% decrease in human-bear conflicts due to public education programs.



The highest number of bear complaints in CT are issues with bird feeders and trash cans.



There have not been any human fatalities from bear attacks in CT; there have been 10 hunting related fatalities and 118 injuries in the state since 1982.

MORE INFORMATION

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