CONNECTICUT LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS EDUCATION FUND

Bears

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Sightings of and incidents involving black bears has increased. Black bears are smart, opportunistic feeders. Preventing and reducing human interactions with black bears depends on changing problematic human behaviors and removing food attractants.

IMPACTS

Animal & Marine Life

Bears are a keystone species crucial for maintaining ecological balance in their habitats. When feeding on natural food sources, their diverse diet promotes plant diversity, and helps regulate herbivore populations, preventing overgrazing and supporting the health of the ecosystem.

Forests & Green Spaces

Black bears are essential to forest ecosystems, spreading seeds over wide areas—often surpassing birds in this role—and aiding plant growth. Their feeding behavior creates gaps in the forest canopy, allowing sunlight to reach the ground and fostering biodiversity. By breaking apart logs while searching for food, they speed up decomposition and return nutrients to the soil, enhancing forest health.

CURRENT POLICY STATUS

- Current state statute already allows the DEEP commissioner to kill a bear if there is a public health or safety threat (CGS 26-3).
- Bear hunting is illegal in CT.
- In 2023, the Connecticut General Assembly passed, and the governor signed into law, Public Act 23-77. The Act permits individuals to apply for permits to take bears that are damaging crops, livestock, or beehives, when non-lethal methods are ineffective or impractical. It also prohibits the intentional feeding of potentially dangerous animals, including bears, and grants the right to use lethal force in self-defense, to protect others, or to defend pets in certain situations.

LEGISLATIVE SOLUTIONS

- Most incidents with bears are driven by habituation and human food sources, and public education is critical to reversing that trend.
- Wildlife advocates continue to call for conflict reduction programs that provide funding to communities for public education programs, bear-resistant trash cans and electric fencing around chickens and beehives.
- The CT Coalition to Protect Black Bears (ct-bears.org) supports legislation that promotes effective, non-lethal strategies for preventing problems with black bears.

In 2014, Yosemite National Park reported a 92% decrease in human-bear conflicts due to public education and garbage/food containment programs. This is just one example of how communities can resolve bear issues.

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

Public education on the vital role of black bears to our local ecology.

Not feeding bears intentionally or unintentionally.

Removing food attractants (garbage, bird feeders pet food, etc.) from March through November.

Protecting beehives, chickens and livestock with electric barriers and other deterrents.

Waiting to put garbage cans out until the morning of pick-up and using bear-proof containers and dumpsters.

Making bears uncomfortable in your yard with aversive conditioning. This includes making loud noises with an air horn, hand clapping or yelling. This teaches bears to associate humans with danger, leave the area and avoid it in the future.

Posting signs on state hiking trails, advising hikers of what to do in case of bear encounters.

Keeping dogs supervised and leashed while walking or hiking.

FAST FACTS

Scientific studies show that hunting pressure does not reduce human-bear conflicts.

Human-bear conflicts are more closely correlated with food availability, according to various scientific studies. For example, Obbard et al wrote: "We found no significant correlations between harvest and subsequent human-bear conflicts [HBC]. Although it may be intuitive to assume that harvesting more bears should reduce HBC, empirical support for this assumption is lacking despite considerable research (Garshelis 1989, Treves and Karanth 2003, Huygens et al. 2004, Tavss 2005, Treves 2009, Howe et al. 2010, Treves et al. 2010)."

Hunts may INCREASE human-bear interactions:

A recent study (2022) found that even with significant hunting harvests, "...there was no concomitant reduction in interactions or incidents and, in fact, these were higher in areas with the new spring season relative to control areas."[1]

Hunts do not eliminate nuisance complaints:

Research in states with legal bear hunting found that hunts do not eliminate nuisance complaints because bears killed deep in the woods are not the same bears that people complain about in more developed areas, where hunting is not allowed.

Bear populations are self-regulating:

If a female bear is not able to gain roughly 1 50 pounds within four months of fertilization, her pregnancy naturally terminates.

MORE INFORMATION

Annie Hornish
Humane World for Animals
ahornish@humaneworld.org

1. Joseph Northrup et al., Experimental Test of the Efficacy of Hunting for Controlling Human-Wildlife Conflict, 6th International Human-Bear Conflict Workshop (Lake Tahoe, NV: humanbearconflicts.org, 2022).