
Title: **Handling Human and Bear Conflicts**

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Purpose:

Black bears were common in Georgia prior to early settlement in the eighteenth century. Habitat losses associated with agricultural land clearing and large-scale logging operations reduced the bear population to low levels by the 1930s. By the 1940s the American Chestnut, a major food source, had been virtually eliminated, which further reduced the bear population. By 1950 the statewide bear population was estimated at 650 with approximately 50 animals in north Georgia, not more than 40 along the Ocmulgee River in central Georgia, not more than 60 along the Savannah River and other coastal rivers, and approximately 500 in the Okefenokee Swamp. Since that time, bear populations have steadily increased in number. The statewide bear population is currently estimated between 2,300 and 2,500 bears with approximately 1,200-1,500 in north Georgia, 200-300 along the Ocmulgee River in central Georgia, and 700-800 in the Okefenokee Swamp and surrounding area.

During the past decade, human population growth and associated development into bear habitat has resulted in an increase in conflicts between people and bears. Habitat loss and degradation combined with a general lack of knowledge about bears by many residents has resulted in a fearful perception of bears. This perception contributes to bear-human conflicts and results in over 700 calls annually to WRD reporting the sighting of bears or registering bear complaints. Public awareness of the availability and accessibility of WRD associates has created a “call them and they will move it” attitude. However, relocation is rarely the answer.

Bear complaints include sightings, feeding on human-provided foods, crop damage, and property damage. Damage to apiaries is more common in south Georgia and is limited to small non-commercial operations in north Georgia. There are an infinite number of non-natural food items that will attract bears; however, garbage, birdseed, and pet food are the three most common types of attractants. Nuisance complaints typically increase when natural food sources are limited. This occurs annually in the spring, when bears emerge from their winter dens, and again in late summer.

Capturing and relocating bears is inappropriate in most instances for several reasons. Relocating bears to unfamiliar territory subjects the individual bear to stress and other potential hazards. For example, bears exhibit strong homing instincts and often attempt to return to their original territory. As a result, many relocated bears have been killed on roadways. Also, male bears will defend their territories, often resulting in relocated bears being killed (especially young males). Finally, relocation is generally counter-productive if the bear returns or if another bear moves into the vacated territory and subsequently becomes a nuisance. For these reasons, relocation should only be considered in extreme cases. The best and most effective way to resolve human-bear conflicts is to remove whatever is attracting the bear(s) to an area. Non-compliance with recommended practices related to food-storage, garbage management, and the use of bird feeders attracts bears, creates problems, and facilitates habituation to humans.

Everyone, including residents, and state and federal agencies, must take a more responsible and proactive role in alleviating bear problems. Educating the general public and state and federal agencies on means of preventing bear problems is the first step in ensuring successful policy.

WRD associates receiving a bear complaint should make an initial investigation. During this initial contact, explaining bear behavior associated with juvenile movements or food shortages may solve the problem. Advising the complainant to remove the attractant is often all that is required.

If the complainant is not resolved, all information should be relayed to the appropriate Game Management (GM) office for further action. A report of all bear complaints should be recorded by the associate handling the complaint and maintained in the appropriate Region Office files. Documentation of all bear complaints facilitates further decisions on how to handle specific situations. Consistent guidelines and policies, related to bears, and their consistent implementation are key ingredients in the success of this policy.

Definitions:

“Traditional bear range” refers to areas in Georgia where bears are currently known to exist on a year-round basis and where cubs are known to have been born and raised successfully (Attachment 1). Defining a range map for species like black bears that utilize large home ranges of several thousand acres in size is difficult and the utility of such a map is limited. It is not uncommon for bears to be sighted outside of the areas shaded on this map.

“Nuisance bear” refers to a bear that has become habituated to humans, is conditioned to human-provided foods, has repeatedly caused significant property or commercial agricultural damage, or poses a significant threat to public health or safety as determined by the WRD.

“Transient bear” refers to a bear that has been sighted or encountered outside of traditional bear range. It also may refer to a bear that has wandered into an urban/suburban area but that otherwise does not appear to be a habituated problem.

Policy:

I. Specific Complaints and Recommendations

A. Transient bears

Most bears encountered outside of traditional bear range, particularly in urban areas, are young dispersing males. After having been raised by the sow for the first year of their life, these young males are on their own and in territorial competition with adult males. Adult males are generally responsible for forcing them out of familiar territory. In most cases, if left alone, these juvenile bears will eventually make their way back to traditional bear range. Bears treed or sighted in urban areas should be left alone and allowed to leave on their own. By the next morning the bear will have usually left the area. In most instances, local authorities, the media, or residents should not be allowed to keep the bear in the area, in a tree, or to harass the bear. Exceptions can be made only at the discretion of WRD. Seek assistance and cooperation of local law

enforcement officials when necessary. Transient bears seldom need to be trapped and relocated. Rarely, these bears will be found in situations within residential or commercial areas that warrant capture and relocation. For further information, refer to sections VI (A) “Trapping” and VI (B) “Chemical Immobilization”.

B. Nuisance Bears

1. Private Property

- a. The key to solving complaints in this category is removal of intentional or unintentional attractants. This should be done before the bear becomes habituated to receiving the reward. Research indicates that individual bears that continue to find attractants and associate them with people are increasingly difficult to break from this association. If the feeding pattern changes from night to day and/or if the bear exhibits progressively aggressive behavior, indicating habituation to humans, relocation or euthanasia of the bear may be an option.
- b. Garbage, pet food, and birdseed are well-known bear attractants. Obviously, removing these attractants should solve the problem. Bears will not be relocated where property owners, managers, or lessees refuse to remove the attractant(s). Other attractants should be treated the same as pet food. Bears in apiaries, commercial agricultural crop fields, and dumpsters are addressed later in this document.
- c. In some cases, bears are intentionally attracted to residences or other locations, in order to view them. When the bear continues to demand a reward, it is then perceived as a problem and the resident wants the bear removed. Bears should not be relocated under these circumstances unless public safety is compromised. Individuals providing the attractant should be handled according to WRD’s policy on feeding bears. Upon noting the attractant, WRD personnel should provide verbal guidance that the attractant must be removed. If the attractant is not removed, written guidance/warning should be given to the individual. Upon a third incident, the individual should be cited for unlawfully concentrating bears (OCGA §27-3-27).
- d. Management options include: removal of the attractant, scare pistols, rubber projectiles, chemical repellents, chasing with dogs, relocation or euthanasia of the bear. Under no circumstances should an individual be advised to sprinkle or spray the bear with a shotgun or other firearm.

2. Public Lands

- a. Increasing use of public recreation and camping areas has led to increases in the volume of garbage, resulting in an escalation of bear complaints in these areas. Removing the attractant by using bear-proof garbage containers and ensuring that garbage is picked up before nightfall usually alleviates these problems. When bear problems are reasonably anticipated, all food scraps should be removed from grills and fire pits daily. All such areas (private, state, and federal) that are located in traditional bear range should convert all garbage containers to bear-proof systems, including bear-proof containers

and pulley systems. Procurement of a specified number of bear-proof garbage containers can be included in each management authority's budget on an annual basis until complete coverage is achieved. Periodic maintenance of existing bear-proof garbage systems is necessary to avoid problems.

- b. Information on bears and garbage disposal should be posted clearly throughout the area and made available as handouts to visitors. Programs on bear life history and habitat information should be offered and given where appropriate.
- c. Game Management Section will provide technical assistance to fish hatchery personnel to alleviate problems associated with mortality pits, food storage and other hatchery operations and facilities.
- d. Bears will not be trapped or euthanized under any circumstances unless public safety is compromised. Similar to our policy on private lands, bears will not be trapped where landowners or managers refuse to remove the attractants, refuse to reasonably address situations resulting in the presence of attractants, have removed bear-proof containers or pulley systems, or otherwise fail to provide appropriate bear-resistant food/garbage storage options.
- e. Management options include: removal of attractant (convert to bear-proof garbage containers, pick up garbage daily, electric fences around garbage storage areas, removal of food scraps from grills and fire pits daily, addition of bear-proof food storage devices), scare pistols, rubber projectiles, chemical repellents, chasing with dogs, relocation or euthanasia of the bear. Under no circumstances should an individual be advised to sprinkle or spray the bear with a shotgun or other firearm.

3. Bears in Apiaries

- a. Research indicates that electric fences are nearly 100 percent effective at keeping bears out of bee yards. Education is the key. Relocation of these bears will only be considered when other efforts have failed.
- b. Management options include: electric fence around yard, scare pistols, rubber projectiles, chasing with dogs, capture and release the bear on site, relocation of the bear. Under no circumstances should an individual be advised to sprinkle or spray the bear with a shotgun or other firearm.

4. Bears in Agricultural Crop Fields

- a. This is possibly the most difficult depredation complaint to handle. Bear relish corn, particularly in the milk stage, and obviously the attractant cannot be removed. Enticing a bear into a trap in a corn depredation situation is difficult at best. Trapping with a culvert trap or snare, drugging and releasing the offending animal on site or in the vicinity may be an effective aversion technique.
- b. Management options include: scare pistols, rubber projectiles, chemical repellents, chasing with dogs, capture and release the bear on site, relocation of the bear. Under no circumstances should an individual be advised to sprinkle or spray the bear with a shotgun or other firearm.

II. Handling Other Bear Incidents

A. Bears Injured or killed on roadways

Bears injured on roadways should either be euthanized or left alone. If the public is present, it may be necessary to remove the bear from the area prior to administering euthanasia. No bear carcasses are to be given to motorists or other private individuals. If available, landfills or incineration may be the best disposal method. See additional guidance below in section V (C) "Carcass Disposal."

B. Cubs

1. Cubs not known to be orphaned
 - a. Cubs should be returned immediately and left in the vicinity where found. Onlookers should be advised to leave the area and to leave the cubs alone in order that they may be reunited with the sow.
2. Cubs known to be orphaned
 - a. These cubs should be handled differently depending on the time in which they are found. Before June 1st, orphaned cubs should be placed permanently in a properly licensed facility. Contact the Special Permit Office (SPU; 770-761-3044) for help in locating a suitable facility. Under no circumstances should the decision to place cubs be made without consulting the SPU. In the event SPU determines that no suitable facilities are available, the cub(s) should be euthanized. After June 1st, cubs known to be orphaned may be released in the vicinity where found or if this is not feasible because of high human activity, dogs, etc., then the cubs should be released in another suitable remote locations.

Under no circumstances are cubs reared in captivity to be released in the wild.

III. Euthanasia

A. Euthanasia should be considered when dealing with:

1. Habituated bears
2. Food-conditioned bears
3. Injured bears
4. Known orphaned cubs where no suitable facility is found (prior to June 1st)
5. Bears that have caused bodily harm to humans or have otherwise been deemed by WRD as a threat to public safety

If the public is present it may be necessary to remove the bear from the area prior to administering euthanasia.

In instances where WRD has determined that a particular bear should be euthanized, documentation, in the form of a memo (Attachment 2), should be prepared and filed in the region office and sent to GM HQ and to the Bear Project Leader. This memo should include a summary of the problem, causes, and why the decision was made to euthanize. Once a bear has been euthanized a follow-up report memo should be placed in the Region's file and forwarded to GM HQ and the Bear Project Leader.

B. "Two Strike" Rule

Any nuisance bear that has been captured/handled by WRD or other natural resource agencies and that is subsequently involved in nuisance behavior, if captured again and properly identified as having exhibited nuisance behavior or habituation in the past, will be euthanized. An exception to this rule may exist for bears originally or subsequently involved in agricultural depredation situations. WRD associates involved in the capture/handling of a marked bear will contact the appropriate GM regional office for guidance in determining the situation that resulted in the original capture/marketing of the bear and whether or not this exception is applicable.

C. Carcass Disposal

If there is no known current need for a particular bear carcass, or if it is unsuitable for mounting, then it should be disposed of in a manner inaccessible to the general public. If available, landfills or incineration may be the best disposal method, according to EPD guidelines. Bear carcasses retained by WRD require that a harvest tag is affixed, an upper premolar is collected for aging, and a standard bear data form is completed. When possible, bear carcasses recovered from road-kills, illegal harvest (i.e., confiscated bears after the carcass is no longer needed for evidence), and bears that have to be euthanized, should be made available to educational facilities. WRD associates involved in donating a bear to an educational facility should provide the regional bear committee representative with written details of the donation (tag #, education organization, etc). For further information, refer to the section IV (A) "Bears injured or killed on roadways" and/or VI (D) "Data Collection." Requests for bears that cannot be met by the region should be sent to the Bear Project Leader to determine if a suitable bear carcass is available elsewhere. Bear carcasses, or carcass parts, are not to be given to motorists or other private individuals under any circumstances.

IV. Capture Protocol and Data Collection

A. Trapping

1. Culvert traps and/or snares may be utilized for trapping.

2. Culvert traps should be clearly marked as dangerous.
3. When possible, traps should be set in a location that will minimize a captured animal's exposure to the elements and should be checked at least once every 24 hours (allowing the resident to check and rebait the trap is acceptable in most cases).
4. Set traps as far from human activity as possible.
5. An effort should be made to notify residents in the immediate area that bear traps can be dangerous and may catch non-target species such as dogs. They should be advised to confine all domestic animals.
6. If the trap is located in an area with high human activity (e.g., a densely-populated residential or commercial area), it should be set only after sunset and closed at sunrise to lessen chances of injury to people.

B. Chemical Immobilization

1. If the bear is located in a populated area and human spectators are a problem, advise local authorities that we will not anesthetize a bear for simply being in a tree in a residential or commercial area. Advise authorities that the best course of action is to clear the area of all disturbances (such as people, traffic, or dogs) and allow the bear to leave the area on its own. Bears may not leave until after dark under the best of circumstances. In most instances, local authorities or residents should not be allowed to keep the bear in the area, in a tree, or to harass the bear. Exceptions can be made only at the discretion of WRD. Seek assistance and cooperation of local law enforcement officials when necessary.
2. If the bear does not leave the area after one night without human disturbances, is injured, or if the safety of the bear or people becomes an issue, then attempting to capture the bear becomes an option. Generally, anesthetizing bears in an elevated position is not recommended, however, if deemed appropriate, make provisions to cushion the fall (blankets, mattresses, nets, etc.).
3. If at all possible, WRD associates should avoid using chemicals to immobilize bears within 45 days of bear hunting season to allow for a sufficient elimination period for the drug(s).

C. Marking

All captured and immobilized bears must be tagged with metal ear tags and lip-tattooed using our five-digit tattoo kits. The first digit should represent the GM region marking the bear (e.g., 1-7) followed by the four-digit right ear tag number.

D. Data Collection

All data from bears captured, confiscated (after the carcass is no longer needed for evidence), euthanized, or killed on highways should be recorded on a standard bear data form. An upper premolar should be pulled and sent with the data form to the appropriate GM office (Regions I

and II – Gainesville; Regions III and IV – Fort Valley; Regions V, VI, and VII – Fitzgerald) for compilation.

E. Bear Released

Captured bears that are to be relocated will be transported to an appropriate site and released. Release sites will be determined by the Game Management Region in which the bear will be released. All release sites will be located on state-managed WMAs. They will be remote locations that are not easily accessible by the general public.

VII. Miscellaneous

A. Chemical Repellents

Some chemical repellents (emetine, hydrochloride, alpha-naphthyl-thio-urea, thiobendazole) have shown promise, through research, in reducing the attractiveness of human-provided foods to wildlife, specifically bears. A conditioned taste aversion (CTA) is accomplished when ingestion of a food produces gastrointestinal illness, which results in avoidance of that particular food item or feeding site. Care should be taken to avoid any undesirable secondary effects to humans who might consume meat from an animal exposed to a chemical used for CTA. Therefore, chemicals known to have negative human health/safety implications will not be used in Georgia. As such, lithium chloride should no longer be used for CTA.

Other chemical repellents, identified by research studies and not known to have negative human health/safety implications, may be used in some nuisance bear situations. Similar to our policy regarding use of chemical immobilization drugs and in the absence of further guidance, the use of chemicals for CTA should be avoided within 45 days of bear hunting season to allow for a sufficient elimination period for the drug(s).

Prepared by GM Bear Committee, August 1996

Revised by GM Bear Committee, February 2008

Attachments

Attachment 1 – Traditional Bear Range Map

Attachment 2 – Example of memo documenting WRD has determined a bear should be euthanized

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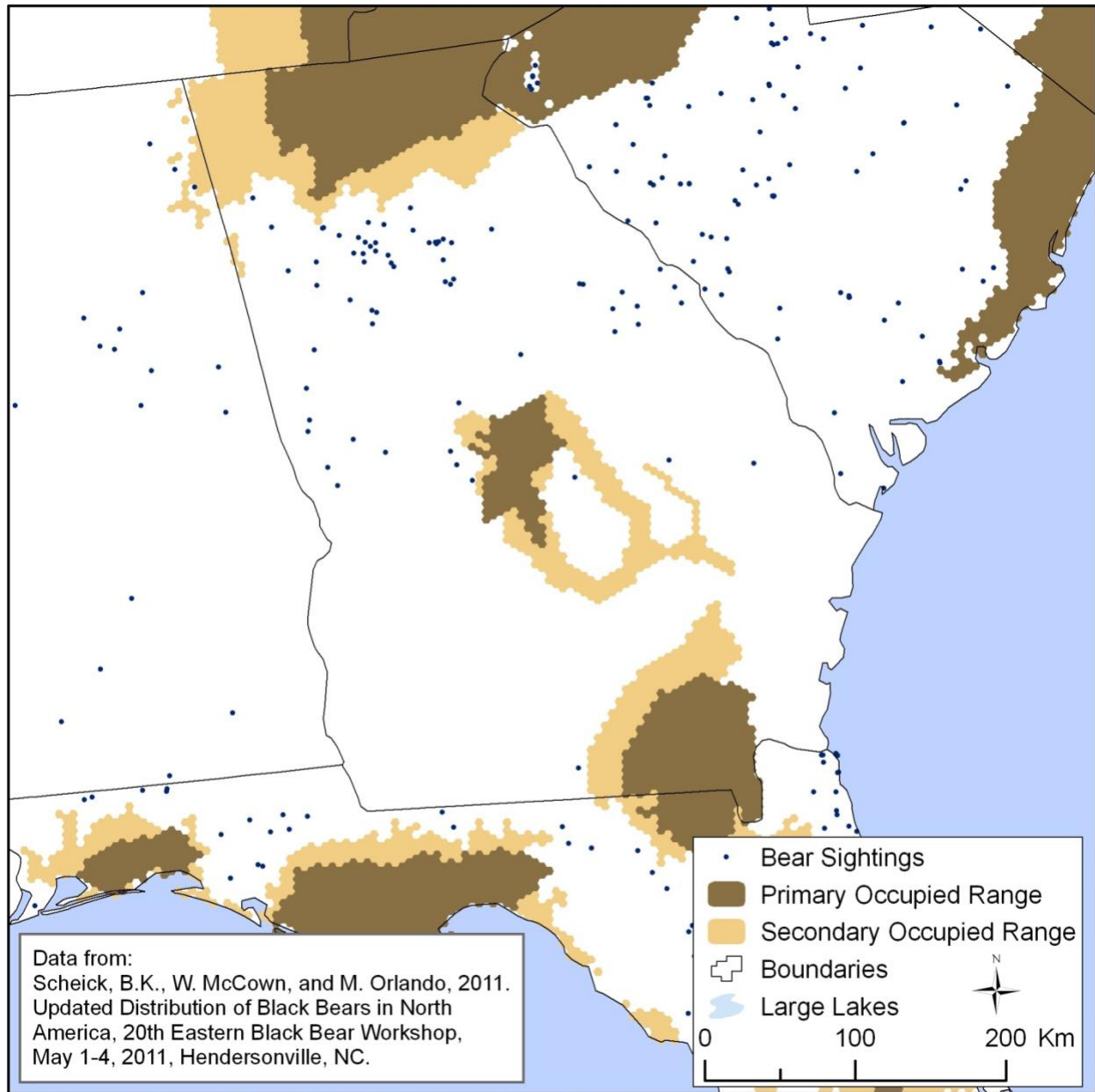
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Traditional Bear Range in Georgia



Noel Holcomb, Commissioner

Dan Forster, Director

Georgia Department of Natural Resources

Wildlife Resources Division, Game Management Section

2150 Dawsonville Highway, Gainesville, GA 30501

(770) 535-5700

FAX (770) 535-5953

Memorandum

To: File
From: Ken Riddleberger
Date: 5/18/2007
Re: Andrew's Cove bear

Multiple reports have been received regarding bear near Hwy 17/75 between Andrew's Cove and Unicoi Gap. Reports indicate that this bear has been receiving food from motorists. This has resulted in the bear remaining near the roadside and approaching vehicles and people. This behavior is consistent with habituation to people. WRD personnel have confirmed this behavior through repeated site visits. Mark Turner and David Shattuck have made several attempts to frighten the bear using scare pistols and aversion techniques, but, unfortunately, this has not resulted in a change in the bear's behavior.

Relocation is not an option as the bear has become habituated to humans and is aggressively seeking handouts of food, including charging at cars in the area. Due to these facts, we have determined that immobilization and euthanasia is the appropriate solution.

