

**BLACK BEAR MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES  
FOR  
BEAR DAU B-18  
GAME MANAGEMENT UNITS  
75, 751, 77, 771, & 78**

Prepared for:  
Colorado Division of Wildlife  
West Region

By:  
Scott Wait  
Terrestrial Wildlife Biologist  
Durango, Colorado

**DESCRIPTION OF MANAGEMENT AREA AND HABITAT**

This DAU is in the southwestern part of Colorado, and includes all of Archuleta County, and parts of La Plata, San Juan, Hinsdale, and Mineral Counties. This DAU has the 3rd highest bear harvest in the state (10% of total), the 6th highest cumulative damage payments (5% of total), and the 5th highest number of complaints (11% of total).

Bears are an opportunistic omnivore, meaning they will eat a variety of plant and animal matter depending on availability and season of year. Bears are classified as a big game animal, and their population is primarily managed through sport harvest and natural self-regulation. Bears do have impacts on other wildlife species populations, but control of another wildlife species population has not been documented scientifically, rather bears are one of many factors that may slow the recovery of small populations or accelerate the decline of small populations. Specific targeted control of bear populations may be warranted in special situations, and can be initiated under the Mammalian Predator Management Policy of the Colorado Wildlife Commission (September 1999).

**TOTAL BEAR HARVEST OBJECTIVE:** From 1988 to 1998, this DAU averaged 58 bears harvested per year, with a range of 38-85. During the same time, the proportion of females in the harvest averaged 36%, and ranged from 28-53%. Sport harvest accounted for 92% of the total harvest, while non-sport harvest has ranged from 0-16 per year.

The objective total harvest for this DAU should be a maximum of 80 as a 3-year average, with a sport harvest objective of 75 as a 3-year average. When these maximum harvest are exceeded for a 3-year period, action should be taken to limit the harvest, or the population re-evaluated to maintain a sport harvest of 9-12% of the total population.

**TOTAL BEAR DAMAGE OBJECTIVE:** From FY 1987-88 to FY 97-98, this DAU averaged \$5,435 per year in game damage claims paid, with a range of \$1,502- 16,080. The type of claim has varied; sheep claims have

December 4, 2000

averaged \$2,636 (\$0-6,528), cattle claims have averaged \$156 (\$0-600) bee hives \$1,331 (\$0-7,913), and all others \$1,856 (\$0-4,516). This DAU should be managed to keep damage payments below \$10,000 on a 3-year average. When that number is exceeded, appropriate action should be taken, such as hiring an investigator/adjustor to verify the claims, or consider a "1 strike rule" when a pattern suggests that a single bear or family group is involved. Electric fences around commercial beehives have proven very effective in the DAU and should be continued.

**NUISANCE BEAR COMPLAINTS:** Nuisance bear complaints have been tracked for 4 years. The number of complaints, type of complaint, and distribution of complaints (locally, regionally, statewide, seasonally) are highly variable, and these data are not collected consistently from all districts. This DAU has averaged 74 complaints per year (23, 39, 197, 37). Complaints should be kept below 90 on a 3-year average. When that objective is exceeded, additional effort could be placed in education/information, or a temporary employee could be hired to contact subdivisions/homeowners and respond to calls. Sport harvest should not be used to target nuisance bears since those bears are usually in housing areas, and the distribution of calls is usually more reflective of natural food crop failures rather than bear population. It is unrealistic to have an objective of 0 nuisance complaints, but because this facet of bear management demands a great deal of time from local DOW personnel, efforts to minimize complaints are important.