

Resident Perceptions of Black Bear Population Management

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BACKGROUND

As black bear (*Ursus americanus*) populations increase in Kentucky, opinions vary on practical ways to manage the growing numbers. Finding methods for managing an increasing black bear population can be quite the challenge for land managers.

As black bear populations continue to increase, managers are seeking an appropriate response to problems introduced by increasing population. Several issues, including budget, public perception, and effectiveness affect how such issues are handled.

Methods

The research team administered a paper survey to visitors throughout the Daniel Boone National Forest during 2016 and 2017.

The methods used in this research are ANOVA, descriptives, and cross-tabulation to measure views on varying black bear management options. ANOVA was used to determine differences between urban and rural populations and their views upon acceptable black bear management. A qualitative analysis was also used to identify what may cause the difference between views on black bear management. Lastly, cross-tabulation was used to determine the relationship, if any, between interactions with black bears and favorability of hunting as an appropriate black bear management option.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Demographics for survey respondents (N=194) were (56%) female, with a mean age of 40 with an age range of 18 to 83. Also, 93% of those surveyed did indicate they were aware that black bears live in Kentucky, and 86% of respondents had not seen an individual black bear in the past 12 months.

About 43% of those surveyed feel habitat management has explained the increase in black bears, and 67% would support (10% would not, 23% unsure) wildlife managers releasing black bears into more areas that contain quality bear habitat.

Respondents were provided with 8 choices for managing black bear populations (Figure 1) when warranted. In addition to this information, about 55% of visitors support black bear hunting, 12% were unsure and 33% opposed hunting black bear. Interestingly, 191 survey takers (98.96%) had never participated in black bear hunting.

Figure 1. Resident Selected Bear Management Preferences	Unacceptable	Unsure	Acceptable
Capture and relocate urban bears	8	14	171
Euthanize black bears captured in urban areas	124	26	44
Educate the public about human-bear conflicts	1	7	185
Use regulated hunting to manage bear numbers	23	40	131
Encourage people to relocate or remove bear attractants	15	17	162
Euthanize bears that repeatedly cause problems for people	63	39	91
Condition bears to stay away from urban areas	11	41	142
Leave bears alone	26	40	127

ALERT!



**Food Storage
Required**

IMPLICATIONS/CONCLUSIONS

Most respondents disagree with euthanizing black bears as a management option, but favor regulated hunting. In addition, other methods of management (visitor education, animal conditioning, and relocation) are favorable.

Due to respondents' support of a wide range of options, managing agencies should consider all these options when controlling black bears in Kentucky. An encompassing education plan, coupled with animal conditioning, may reduce other management options needed into the future.