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Gouveia, Susan

From: Lashway, Lisa
Sent: Tuesday, March 03, 2015 1:47 PM
To: Canning, Sean; Gouveia, Susan; Spitzer, Mark; Nelson, Frank; Wilpert, Frank; Quinn, Tim
Subject: FW: NJDEP - Black Bear Management Policy
Attachments: Black Bear Management Plan -- P18.pdf

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From: Cindy Randazzo [mailto:Cindy.Randazzo@dep.nj.gov]
Sent: Tuesday, March 03, 2015 1:13 PM
To: Cindy Randazzo
Cc: Joseph Rogers
Subject: NJDEP - Black Bear Management Policy

Dear Municipal Official:

Please see the attached NJDEP Press Release concerning the proposed updated Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy.

If you have any questions, please contact me directly.

Sincerely,

Cindy W. Randazzo
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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 3, 2015

Contact: Bob Considine (609) 984-1795
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**NEW JERSEY FISH AND GAME COUNCIL APPROVES PROPOSED UPDATED
COMPREHENSIVE BLACK BEAR MANAGEMENT POLICY**

(15/P18) TRENTON – Based upon research by the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, the New Jersey Fish and Game Council today approved a proposed updated Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy that continues the annual December hunt, adds an October hunt beginning in 2016, and calls for enhanced public education efforts in parts of the state that are experiencing black bear encounters for the first time, among other measures.

“The annual hunting season in the northwestern part of the state has been an important tool in a comprehensive plan designed to control the bear population and reduce conflicts between bears and people,” said Division of Fish and Wildlife Director David Chanda. “The comprehensive policy proposed today continues to stress the importance of research and public education, and is based on the most up-to-date science and population estimates.”

Specifically, the proposed Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy unanimously approved today:

- Continues the annual six-day December firearm hunting season. The hunt may be extended by up to four days if poor weather or other conditions result in a reduced harvest. This year’s hunt will begin December 7.
- Adds an additional six-day October hunting season beginning in 2016, three days for bow hunting only and three days for bow hunting and hunting with muzzle loading guns. The bow hunting season will enable hunting of nuisance bears that can be difficult to hunt by gun in certain areas.
- Increases the allowable per-hunter harvest from one bear to two bears beginning next year, provided the first bear is taken during October bow/muzzle loading hunt and the second is taken during the December firearm hunt.
- Increases, effective this year, the current zones in which hunting is permitted to include the remainders of Hunterdon, Somerset and Morris counties, a small additional portion of Passaic County, and a small portion of Mercer County. This will help control the population in areas where reports of bear and human encounters have been increasing due to bears expanding their habitat.
- Calls for work toward developing an estimate for a statewide bear population.
- Reemphasizes the importance of ongoing public education efforts, trash management and research. Efforts will be focused on urban areas and parts of the state where bears are expanding their range.

The proposed policy, which will be opened to public comment and a public hearing, was developed after extensive research of five bear hunting seasons that have taken place since 2010. The Division has concluded that expanded hunting opportunities are necessary to reduce the size of the population and reduce conflicts with people.

Research over the past five years that included surveys, captures of previously tagged bears, den studies, reproduction analyses and density analyses confirm that northwestern New Jersey continues to have one of the nation's densest black bear populations.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife utilized studies conducted by Penn State University along with widely accepted population estimate methodologies known as the Lincoln-Petersen Index and linear regression modeling to conservatively estimate the size of the black bear population in northwestern New Jersey at 3,500, about the same as when the hunt was first authorized in 2010.

The population has not decreased significantly because reproduction rates, known as recruitment, have exceeded mortality from hunting and natural causes. The number of bears harvested in the five hunts has steadily dropped from 592 in the first season, to less than 300 animals in subsequent seasons, due in large part to poor weather at that time of year and a more wary bear population.

In addition, the December hunt coincides with the time when bears are becoming less active and beginning to den. The December hunt, coinciding with the annual firearm deer hunting season, was purposely planned for this time of year to be conservative as biologists assessed the first five years of hunting.

The hunting zone as approved in 2010 encompassed a roughly 1,000-square-mile area of northwestern New Jersey north of Interstate 78 and west of Interstate 287. This area includes all or portions of Hunterdon, Passaic, Morris, Somerset, Sussex, and Warren counties, and a small portion of Bergen County. This area is home to the majority of the state's black bears.

While the December hunting season appeared to be helping to reduce overall nuisance complaints, the numbers increased in 2014, probably due to lower-than-expected harvest numbers and population increases due in part to black bear reproduction rates that are higher than in other parts of the nation. The number of bear-human interactions in the northwestern part of the state increased from 1,231 to 1,951 over the past year, a 60 percent increase.

The new policy proposed today continues to emphasize the importance of public education and research to reduce conflicts and strives to maintain a sustainable and robust bear population, recognizing its importance as a natural resource valued by the residents of the state and as being important to ecological balance. Future re-adoption cycles for the policy will coincide with seven-year Game Code re-adoption cycles. The Fish and Game Council met at the Assunpink Wildlife Management Area office in Upper Freehold.

The proposed policy will be sent to Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bob Martin, who must approve the policy before it is published in the New Jersey Register and opened for a 60-day public comment period and public hearing.

The New Jersey Fish and Game Council is a volunteer board that is mandated by law to create and finalize hunting and fishing regulations that manage wildlife resources for the benefit of all residents. The Council's Game Committee and the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife thoroughly reviewed all available data in making recommendations for the proposed policy changes.

The Council may make changes based on comments before taking a final vote to approve the policy later this year.

For more information on black bears in New Jersey and a copy of the proposed Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy, please visit: <http://www.nj.gov/dep/fgw/bearfacts.htm>

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