

QUICK FACTS ABOUT THE 2026 FLORIDA BLACK BEAR HUNT



1 **Though Floridians oppose the bear hunt, the state brought it back in 2025, and is preparing for another hunt in 2026.**

Last year, a statewide poll showed 81% of Florida voters opposed the hunt, including 89% against hounding and 86% against baiting. In the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC's) own 2025 survey, three out of four Floridians said "no" to a bear hunt.

2 **In December 2025, FWC was set to allow trophy hunters to kill 172 of Florida's black bears, but we threw a wrench into the works.**

Thanks to the collective efforts of Sierra Club Florida and its partners, we pushed non-hunters to buy state-issued lottery hunting permits so they would remain unused. As a result, more than 52 of the 172 permits allocated for the 2025 bear hunt season were awarded to non-hunters, many of them Sierra Club members. This year, we will be working to spare even more bears, and we'll hope that you join us.

3 **In 2026, the FWC is quietly creating an exclusive, privatized trophy hunt system.**

This year, landowners with 5,000+ acres can skip the public lottery, bypass season limits, deploy bait, use hounds, and secure private bear tags. This isn't "conservation," it's privatization.

4 **In December 2024, FWC staff said black bear populations were still recovering.**

FWC staff reported that three of Florida's seven bear subpopulations remain below recovery goals, and never provided a statewide upper population "threshold" — a crucial omission in the rules.

5 **The FWC admits a hunt won't reduce human-bear conflicts.**

The [BearWise Program](#) works by eliminating easy access to garbage and other attractants.

6 **The FWC is using 11-year-old data to justify a hunt and won't have current numbers until 2029.**

Florida black bears were hunted nearly to extinction by 1974 and their numbers only rebounded to about 4,000 by 2015. FWC staff admit that new population studies won't be completed until "about 2029", making it impossible to accurately estimate the current number of bears, how populations are trending, or what impact bear hunting will have in Florida.

7

Bears are highly intelligent, but orphaned cubs cannot survive in the wild without their mothers.

Florida black bears use tools, solve problems, and form long-term bonds. Cubs stay with their mothers for 18 months or more. Hunters often can't tell if a bear is female or nursing. In Florida's 2015 hunt, approximately 21% of the bears killed were lactating mothers.

8

In 2026, the FWC will allow cruel tactics like hounding and killing at bait stations.

In Florida's infamous 2015 hunt, the FWC banned hounds and prohibited killing bears within 100 yards of bait. The 2025 rules reversed both, permitting up to six dogs to chase bears, close-range killing at bait stations, and bow hunting, which can cause more prolonged suffering than firearms.

9

Florida's smallest bear populations rely on the regions the FWC is opening to hunt.

Florida's bears are split into seven isolated subpopulations, with one estimated at only 30. These small, vulnerable groups depend on their larger neighboring populations to survive, using habitat corridors to avoid inbreeding and collapse. Allowing hunting in those larger stable populations threatens the genetic lifelines that keep the smallest groups alive.

10

Bear census estimates can be wrong.

In 2025, the Osceola National Forest bear census estimates were off by more than two-thirds, forcing the FWC to reduce the number of bear tags originally offered in that bear management area. Because there is no transparency in how the bear census estimates are factored into determining the number of bear tags for the hunt, the public cannot know if they are even close to accurate.



THIS ISN'T JUST ABOUT THE BEARS.

It's a question of whether Florida's wildlife policy is driven by evidence and public interest, or controlled by wealthy interests masquerading as conservation.

Most Floridians support responsible hunting, but before another bear hunt is considered, Florida should know how many bears it actually has, whether populations are increasing or declining, how another hunt will affect connectivity between bear populations, and whether the state has exhausted proven, nonlethal solutions to human-bear conflict.

With no current population science and no demonstrated ecological need, there should be no bear hunt.



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