



9 Facts the DeSantis-appointed Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Can't Defend About the Proposed Bear Hunt

1. Floridians oppose the bear hunt - but the FWC may bring it back anyway.

A statewide poll shows 81% of Florida voters oppose the hunt, including 89% against hounding and 86% against baiting. In the FWC's own survey, three out of four Floridians said no to a bear hunt.¹ But in May, commissioners ignored the public and advanced the hunt anyway² - with a final vote scheduled for August 13-14 in Havana, Florida.³

2. The FWC is quietly creating an exclusive, privatized trophy hunt system.

Starting in 2026, landowners with 5,000+ acres can skip the public lottery, bypass season limits, deploy bait, use hounds, and secure private bear tags. While regular hunters face capped quotas, there's no limit on how many landowners can enroll - and the rules⁴ don't specify whether private tags count toward the statewide quota. Some may claim they do, but the rules don't require it - a glaring loophole. This special program gives the wealthy and politically connected access no average Floridian gets. This isn't "conservation"⁵ - it's privatization.

3. One staffer gets permanent authority to green-light bear hunts — with no vote, no input, and no guardrails.

The FWC's proposed rule gives the Executive Director the power to approve bear hunts every year⁶ with no Commission vote, no public input, and no requirement to follow peer-reviewed science. The rule lists vague population metrics, but sets no hard standards for how they're used. If this is approved, the public may never have another chance to weigh in on bear hunts again.

4. In December, staff said black bear populations were still recovering - but by May, the Commission pushed a hunt anyway.

FWC staff reported that three of Florida's seven bear subpopulations remain below recovery goals⁷, and emphasized the impact of fragmented habitat⁸ on long-term viability. Their report made no mention of overpopulation - and formally recommended: *"No action is requested at this time"*⁹. But just five months later, under political pressure, the Commission reversed course. Even the FWC admits a hunt won't reduce human-bear conflicts¹⁰ - which mostly stem from easy access to garbage and other attractants.¹¹

5. The FWC's own staff didn't recommend a hunt - until they were pressured to contradict themselves.

In December, FWC staff gave an official update^{12,13} on the state's Black Bear Management Plan¹⁴ - and made no mention of hunting. That changed only after Commissioner Gary Lester requested it - and staff complied.¹⁵ They were then directed to draft hunting rules - forced to justify a so-called "harvest." Commissioner Hudson requested a statewide upper population "threshold,"¹⁶ but staff never provided it - a crucial omission in the rules.

6. The FWC is using 10-year-old data to justify a hunt - and won't have current numbers until at least 2029.

Florida black bears were hunted nearly to extinction by 1974¹⁷ and only rebounded to about 4,000 by 2015¹⁸. That figure has not been updated in a decade. In December 2024, FWC staff admitted they won't complete new population studies until "about 2029."¹⁹ Yet the agency is moving forward with a hunt now - without knowing how many bears exist, how populations are trending, or what impact the hunt will have. No peer-reviewed science supports this decision, and no data shows bears are exceeding habitat limits - making this a science-washed policy, not science-based management.

7. Bears are highly intelligent - and this hunt will orphan their cubs.

Florida black bears use tools, solve problems, and form long-term bonds. Cubs stay with their mothers for 18 months or more.²⁰ Even with bait and hounds, hunters often can't tell if a bear is female or nursing. 21% of the bears killed in 2015 were lactating mothers.²¹

8. The FWC wants to allow cruel tactics like hounding and killing at bait stations.

In its infamous 2015 hunt, the FWC banned hounds and prohibited killing bears within 100 yards of bait. The proposed rules would reverse both²² - permitting up to six dogs to chase bears, and killing close-range at bait stations. Baiting and hounding were at the center of a 2018 case prosecuted by Florida's Attorney General - who called it: "cruelty to animals; the worst of the worst."²³ These methods are in addition to archery - which can cause more prolonged suffering than firearms.²⁴

9. Florida's smallest bear populations rely on the regions the FWC wants to hunt.

Unlike other states with larger, connected bear ranges, Florida's bears are split into seven isolated subpopulations - one estimated at only 30.²⁵ These small, vulnerable groups depend on their larger neighboring populations to survive, using habitat corridors to avoid inbreeding, deformities, and collapse.²⁶ But the FWC is proposing to allow hunting in those larger stable populations²⁷ - threatening the genetic lifelines that keep the smallest groups alive. The FWC points to total "suitable habitat²⁸" - but that's different than connected, usable habitat. Fragmentation is the real threat, and these disconnected populations are still at risk of collapse.

THIS ISN'T JUST ABOUT THE BEARS. This isn't a debate between emotion and science - 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 - and deserve a wildlife agency that serves the people, not the politically connected. The FWC wants trust, but trust must be earned - through honesty, credible science, and restraint. Florida's Black Bears are barely a third of their original population - we should not hunt them. If this proposal isn't about human-bear conflict, and there's no ecological need, then what - or who - is it really for?

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