

The New Jersey Black Bear



- ◇ Bear Smart Legislation
- ◇ Management Recommendations



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Summary

Pragmatic Bear Smart legislation corrects a signal failure to organize, implement, and enforce non-lethal solutions preferred by 74% of New Jersey voters.



Bear-resistant, heavy duty commercial dumpster.

Securing garbage and food is the most effective means of limiting human-bear interaction in campgrounds and front-country communities; a significant number of towns abut public lands.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife is not enforcing the extant bear feeding ban, which contains loopholes and unclear language. Across jurisdictions, non-lethal methods have proved far superior to random recreational killing. The latter increases “nuisance” behavior and garbage foraging by orphaned cubs and yearlings. Statistically, gunning presents increased public safety risks. Unsecured garbage in urban areas creates urban sinks, attracting bears from outlying, wild areas.

A former Department of Environmental Protection commissioner openly questioned the validity of Division of Fish and Wildlife science, enforcement, and complaint data. Unexplained, abnormally high female kill ratios in New Jersey, peer rejection of New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife baseline population data (the 2003 black bear population estimate was inflated by 50%), tagged bear under-sampling, negative peer reviews, and fabricated after-the-fact “harvest predictions” underscore the need for mainstream sanitation solutions.

NBC NewYork spotted dozens of trash cans Monday morning in Allamuchy, Independence and Liberty Townships that were not ‘bear proof’ and in fact could be open with a pinkie finger. Many of them were not even closed because there was so much trash in them.

Likewise, a pizza restaurant in Liberty had an open dumpster overflowing with food packaging.

– NBC NewYork: “Christie Considers Cutting Bear Hunt Short.” December 7, 2010.

Mason Dixon (2010): 74 Percent of New Jersey Voters Prefer Non-Lethal Methods of Solving Conflicts Between Bears and Humans

According to an April, 2010 statewide survey conducted by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research, Inc. for the Humane Society of the United States[1]:

- ◇ 74 percent of registered voters prefer that the state prioritize non-lethal methods of solving conflicts between humans and bears.
- ◇ The survey results were consistent in every geographic region of the state, with a 10 percent majority opposed to hunting bears.

Registered voters strongly oppose:

- ◇ Hunting of bear cubs under one-year of age, some of whom are still nursing.
- ◇ Killing of mother bears, or sows, with cubs, and the
- ◇ Use of bait to lure bears to locations where hunters shoot the animals while they are feeding.

The New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife permits and encourages all of the aforementioned practices.

Bear Smart, Proactive Legislation

- ◇ Requires campgrounds, closed communities and bear-area municipalities to institute and enforce meaningful bear-resistant trash bin and dumpster programs.
- ◇ Directs the Public Health Council to provide a list of all municipalities located in bear habitat within 90 days of enactment.
- ◇ Requires the Public Health Council adopt amendments to the State Sanitary Code setting appropriate standards and specifications for bear-resistant dumpsters and garbage bins required by municipalities.
- ◇ Addresses intentional baiting that attracts and feeds bears near human centers.



County Road, West Milford
April 2009

The apparent slow pace of getting bear resistant containers in widespread use in New Jersey is practically and morally very disturbing.

– Winthrop Staples III, government wildlife technician, Denali National Park.

Division of Fish and Wildlife enforcement of the 2002 Bear Feeding Law remains poor. The legislation is riddled with loopholes and, arguably, unclear language. By extension, local ordinances, where they exist, are vague and unenforced. In West Milford and other front-country townships, many residents still use black plastic trash bags – *sans* bins. Throughout front country parks, campgrounds, and communities, open dumpsters and bins are in plain sight.

Management Recommendations:

- ◇ Educating the public about keep human food from bears
- ◇ Requiring the public to, and providing the means to, secure food and garbage
- ◇ Enforcing requirements and laws
- ◇ Land use decisions and other strategies to keep people and bears apart

– Wildlife Conservation Society, 2008.[2]



Bear resistant trash cans are available in stores and online.



The 4 closed bins on the left are bear-resistant; the 5th, an open can is not.

The good news is that efforts to reduce the availability of anthropogenic food to bears can be quite successful at reducing bear-human conflict, as evidenced by some of our case studies. An important message from the New Mexico case study is that when food was made unavailable, bears were capable of living in close proximity to humans without conflict.

– Wildlife Conservation Society, 2008.[3]

[1] Another, publicized 2010 New Jersey survey featured a question originally designed for an organization seeking a bear hunt and did not provide respondents with the non-lethal option.

[2] Beckmann, J. P., Karasin, L., Costello, C., Matthews, S. and Smith, Z. (2008) Coexisting with Black Bears: Perspectives from Four Case Studies Across North America, WCS Working Paper No. 33. New York: Beckman et al. 53.

[3] Beckmann, et al. 53.