



# SPRING BLACK BEAR HUNTING

## The Facts about Spring Bear Hunting

1. Black bears are abundant in Alberta with an estimated population of 35,000. The *General Status of Alberta Wild Species 2005* lists their status as “secure.”
2. Alberta’s strategy for managing black bears is outlined in a *Management Plan for Black Bears in Alberta*. A summary of this plan, entitled Bears in Alberta, can be found through the My Wild Alberta website, [www.mywildalberta.com](http://www.mywildalberta.com).
3. Black bears can cause damage to livestock, apiaries and crops, as well as creating hazards in areas of human activity. As a result, a number are relocated or removed from the population annually as nuisance animals.
4. Hunting is an effective management tool to control population numbers where depredation occurs and can increase the wariness of bears towards humans.
5. Black bears are hunted in both spring and fall seasons. About 2,500 or less black bears (approximately 6% of the population) are harvested annually through regulated hunting; the majority during spring seasons. This annual harvest is well below what the population can sustain, and management goals desire.
6. The hunting of black bear cubs or female black bears with cubs is prohibited in Alberta. Some females will not have cubs and may be harvested legally.
7. A study on the effect of hunting on cub mortality was completed in 2005. This five-year study, entitled “*Effects of hunting on demographic parameters of American black bears*” was conducted by Sophie Czetwertynski under the direction of Dr. Mark Boyce of the University of Alberta. The study tested for the existence and the relative influence of sexually selected infanticide (killing of an infant) and density dependence in regulating demographic parameters. It monitored 290 bears in two hunted areas and an adjoining unhunted area. The study manipulated the areas using a modified before-after control-impact (BACI) design, whereby bait sites for hunting were closed in 1 of the 2 hunted areas in years 3 and 4. Adult males in the unhunted area were removed in year 3.

Some interesting facts from the study included:

- The results did not support a significant influence of sexually selected infanticide.
- The study found lower cub survival and older age reproduction in the unhunted, higher density area rather than lower density hunted area.
- No difference in body condition of males and females between areas was found, suggesting that sexually selected infanticide did not affect reproduction.
- The study did not detect an influx of new males or a change in cub survival after removal of adult males from the unhunted areas.
- The results suggested that the sexually selected infanticide does not affect the population growth rate of hunted black bear populations.

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8. Baiting for black bears is legal in parts of Alberta, except in areas that have established populations of grizzly bears. Baiting is intended to increase harvests where depredations occur in agricultural areas. It also provides hunters with the opportunity to identify and select legal bears, and accurately place their shots.
9. Bear meat is edible and many people enjoy it in a variety of forms.
10. The spring bear hunt is based on sound principles of wildlife management and is an integral part of Alberta's black bear management program. It helps ensure that black bear populations are carefully managed, thus securing their future well being in the province.
11. In 1999, the government of Ontario succumbed to political pressure, ignored compelling science, and banned the early season black bear hunt. Despite fierce opposition by the **Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (O.F.A.H)** and other conservation organizations, the hunt was cancelled, and a vital bear management tool was lost. Today, as a direct result of that decision, the once highly valued black bear has been regulated to the status of vermin. Bear cubs, who were supposed to be protected by the cancellation of the early season hunt, are instead, being orphaned in greater numbers than ever before. As female bears with cubs are increasingly forced into contact with humans over limited food and habitat, these once prized animals are being relocated or killed. So far, the Ministry of Natural Resources' (M.N.R) response to the dangerous escalation in bear/human conflict has been limited to the Bear Wise program, which is currently under government review. The program's own statistics reveal there is an upward trend in bear occurrences (resulting in phone or onsite response) from 8,547 in 2004/2005 to an estimated 12,645 in 2007/2008. The trend would be downward or stable if bear populations were being well managed.

## KEY CONTACTS

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