



Benefits of Restoring Fair Chase Bear Hunting: Lessons from Other States

The Mainers for Fair Bear Hunting ballot initiative would restore fair-chase principles to bear hunting in our state by ending the use of GPS-collared dog packs, piles of bait, and traps for bear hunting. In Oregon, Washington, Massachusetts, and Colorado, bear trapping has long been illegal, and voters prohibited bear hounding and baiting by wide margins at the ballot in the 1990s. Evidence from such states clearly demonstrates that reinstating fair bear hunting by eliminating these cruel, unsporting practices benefits both wildlife and traditional hunting.

Increased bear hunting participation and revenue

If hounding, baiting and trapping are prohibited and fair chase is restored to the sport of bear hunting in Maine, it's likely there will be significantly more bear hunters. States like Oregon, Washington, and Colorado have seen a substantial long-term growth in the number of bear hunters and stable or higher bear harvests following bans on hounding and baiting. For example, since Oregon prohibited hounding and baiting in 1994, **bear tag sales have almost tripled**, revenue from bear tag sales has **more than tripled**, and nonresident bear tag revenue in the state has almost **doubled**. According to a researcher with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife: “[I]t was relatively easy to offset the adverse fiscal effects of the required restrictions on hunting methods.”¹ In Washington, the number of bear hunting tags has more than quadrupled and the number of bear hunters in Colorado has **more than tripled** since the state prohibited baiting and hounding.²

Stable bear populations

States that opted to restore fair chase to bear hunting have continued to maintain relatively stable bear populations. Since their bans in the mid-1990s on baiting and hounding, Colorado, Oregon, and Washington have seen no significant growth in bear numbers. Oregon and Washington's respective bear populations have remained at 25-30,000 bears, the same size as Maine's.³

“Hunters learn different techniques on how to hunt,” says Doug Cottam, a biologist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. He draws a distinction between the coastal forests of his district (“this unbelievably thick habitat type from the Cascades to the coast”) and the more open plains and mountain sides elsewhere in Oregon's bear country. “Here on the coast, in this jungle, the hounds men and using bait was how it was traditionally done, because hiking and spotting them here seemed almost impossible. But a lot of these western Oregon Hunters have adjusted... If you know what you're looking for and where to go, you can hunt bears effectively without bait or hounds.”⁴

Stable conflict management

States that opted to restore fair chase to bear hunting have continued to maintain relatively stable bear nuisance complaint levels. For example, in Oregon, where hounding and baiting were banned in 1994, the number of nuisance complaints reported the year prior to the ban (436) is virtually identical to the number of complaints (457) lodged in 2011, the most recent year for which data is available. Furthermore, the average number of annual complaints (487) has remained relatively constant following the ban,⁵ despite the fact that Oregon's human population increased by roughly a million people during that same time. In Washington, where baiting and hounding were prohibited in 1996, nuisance complaints (300-500 annually) have also remained relatively stable, even though the state's human population has soared from around 5 million in 1996 to nearly 7 million in 2011.⁶

Colorado parks and Wildlife carnivore biologist Jerry Apker believes what drives nuisance complaints in that state is the rapid human expansion into former bear habitat, but not the 1992 ban on spring bear

hunting baiting, and hounding in Colorado as a result of a citizen-led initiative. Apker said, “People who sit there and point to all these conflicts as a consequence of Colorado’s vote, that’s B.S. That’s just totally untrue.”⁷

Improved bear management through enhanced selectivity

As other states have discovered, fair chase bear hunting generally results in more sustainable age-sex selectivity than baiting and hounding. Data confirm that fair chase bear hunting can, in fact, be more selective with fewer female bears killed. In Washington, where baiting and hounding were prohibited at the ballot in 1996, female bears accounted for an average of 35% of the annual bear harvest in the five years prior to the ban.⁸ In the five years following the ban, that average fell to 34%.⁹ In Oregon, where baiting and hounding were prohibited at the ballot in 1994, the proportion of female bears killed fell nearly six percent on average, from an average of 35% in the five years before the ban to 29% after the ban. Nor were hunters any less discriminating at determining age, since there was no change in the median age of harvested bears after the ban.¹⁰

Regardless of a state’s type of bear habitat, eliminating unsporting, inhumane bear hunting practices benefits wildlife and fair-chase hunting traditions.

Apologists for bear baiting, hounding, and trapping protest that Maine’s woods are “too thick” to hunt bears without resorting to such devices. In states that have banned these practices, however, bear hunters have simply shifted to more traditional scouting techniques, monitoring areas of natural food availability such as berries, beechnuts, acorns, and hazelnuts and utilizing stalk or stand hunting. Massachusetts voters banned baiting and hounding in 1996, and the state’s Department of Fish and Game maintains that “In Massachusetts, natural food availability is more important than either hunting method or hunter participation in determining hunter success and harvests.”¹¹

As Tom Beck, retired Colorado Parks and Wildlife bear biologist points out: “What aggravates me most is that wildlife professionals accept the hunters’ claim that bears can’t be hunted without bait. **Every [bear baiting] state says its woods are ‘too thick.’ I don’t believe anyone who says you can’t hunt bears in the fall when they’re on berries or nuts. You can predict where they’re going to be, and if you’re a woodsman, all you have to do is scout those places. After we banned baiting, it took only two years for our hunters to get to the point where they were killing more bears than they were before. They learned how to do it. There was this large pool of hunters convinced—mostly by the outfitters—that you had to hunt with bait or hounds. These guys didn’t want to spend the money on hounds, and they were opposed to using bait. When they learned the truth, the number of bear hunters skyrocketed.**”¹²

Montana, the state with the second largest hunting participation of any state in the nation, has banned bear hounding since 1921 and bear baiting for over six decades. Montana’s 2011 black bear report boasts: “**Montana offers world renowned, fair-chase black bear hunting, and black bears are a highly treasured big game animal in Montana....Use of dogs to hunt black bears or grizzly bears was prohibited in Montana in 1921....The harvesting of cubs or females with cubs, was prohibited in 1947, followed by a prohibition of the use of baits in 1948. With these regulations in place, black bear hunting became more of a fair chase sport in Montana.**”¹³

It’s time for Maine to end unsporting, cruel bear trapping, baiting, and hounding: Support Mainers for Fair Bear Hunting

¹Carter, Christopher N. (1998). Fiscal effects of voter initiatives to ban certain methods of bear and cougar hunting: Oregon’s experience. *Human Dimensions of Wildlife: An International Journal*, 3:2, 29-41. p. 38

²Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Tag sales refer to all bear hunting license/tag sales, including combination licenses for bears and other species.

Benefits of Restoring Fair Chase Bear Hunting: Lessons from Other States

-
- ³ Source, WA and OR: state wildlife agency data obtained through record request. Oregon Black Bear Management Plan. 2012, September 10. Oregon Dept of Fish and Wildlife. Retrieved May 15, 2013 from: http://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/management_plans/docs/Black_Bear_Management_Plan_2012.pdf. Source CO: "After Colorado banned baiting and hounding in 1992, 'there was no significant increase in bear numbers,' according to Jerry Apker, who's been carnivore biologist for Colorado Parks and Wildlife for 34 years" from <http://www.sunjournal.com/news/maine/2014/05/10/bear-control-matter-numbers-say-both-sides/1531641> "Bear Control is a matter of numbers, say both sides." Douglas Rooks. Sun Journal. May 10, 2014. Jerry Apker "estimates that Colorado's black bear population has risen from around 15,000 in 1992 to just 18,000 today," source: Kevin, Brian. "Welcome to the Circus: That is Black Bear Politics in Maine." *Down East Magazine*. August 2014. Retrieved October 21, 2014 from: <http://www.downeast.com/bear-circus/>.
- ⁴ Kevin, Brian. *Ibid*.
- ⁵ Oregon Black Bear Management Plan. 2012, September 10. Oregon Dept of Fish and Wildlife. Retrieved May 15, 2013 from: http://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/management_plans/docs/Black_Bear_Management_Plan_2012.pdf.
- ⁶ Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2008. 2009-2015 Game Management Plan. Wildlife Program, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Olympia, Washington, USA. Retrieved June 03 2013 from <http://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/00433/wdfw00433.pdf>
- ⁷ Kevin, Brian, *ibid*.
- ⁸ Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife data obtained through record request..
- ⁹ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁰ Oregon Black Bear Management Plan. See also: Margaret C. Boulay, Dewaine H. Jackson and David A. Immell. "Preliminary Assessment of a Ballot Initiative Banning Two Methods of Bear Hunting in Oregon: Effects on Bear Harvest." *Ursus* Vol. 11, A Selection of Papers from the Eleventh International Conference on Bear Research and Management, Graz, Austria, September 1997, and Gatlinburg, Tennessee, April 1998 (1999), pp. 179-184. Published by International Association for Bear Research and Management. p. 183.
- ¹¹ Massachusetts Department of Fish and Wildlife. "Black Bear Hunting Information." Retrieved May 20, 2013 from: www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/.../hunting/bear/bear_hunting_home.htm
- ¹² Williams, Ted. 2005. "Bad News Bear Hunters." *Audubon Magazine*. Retrieved June 10, 2013 from: <http://archive.audubonmagazine.org/incite/incite0509.html> , emphasis added.
- ¹³ Mace, Richard D. and Tonya Chilton-Radant. "Black Bear Harvest Research and Management in Montana 2011 Final Report." *Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks*. 2011. p. vii, p. 5. Emphasis added.