



## FAIR BEAR HUNTING BALLOT INITIATIVE: MYTHS VS. FACTS

Maine is the only state in the country to still allow all three practices of bear hounding, baiting, and trapping. These practices are cruel, unsporting, and scientifically indefensible. Explore below to get the facts.

### IT'S CRUEL TO BEARS AND DOGS.

**MYTH:** *The close range of shooting a bear in a trap, tree, or over bait makes the kill quick and humane.*

**FACT:** **Hounding, baiting, and trapping are unequivocally cruel and unsporting methods of killing bears.** With respect to hounding, once the bear is in the tree, she has already endured a terrifying and exhausting chase by a pack of dogs. Shooting exhausted, frightened bears from tree branches at point-blank range is not humane, nor is it sporting. The initial shot may not kill the animals, and the animal may fall from a high branch or be mauled by the dogs. Even bears killed over bait may not be killed immediately and if they flee from the hunter, they may suffer for hours before succumbing to their injuries.

When captured in a trap, a bear's instinct is to break free, which can lead to extensive injuries. Trappers have even reported bears chewing off their own paws to free themselves.<sup>1</sup> Since these traps must be checked only once per day, the bear could be suffering for hours in excruciating pain until the trapper returns.

**MYTH:** *Hound hunting doesn't cause stress to bears or the hounds chasing them - the bears simply climb trees to escape the dogs.*

**FACT:** **Being chased by barking, snarling dogs is inherently stressful and dangerous to wildlife.** Hounds can maul bears when they catch them on the ground. Chases can separate mothers from their dependent young, who may perish as a result. Loose hounds may kill other wildlife or domestic animals.

**MYTH:** *Hunting dogs are well cared for, even treated "like family".*

**Hounding leads to dog welfare problems and a drain on animal sheltering resources.** Viewed more as hunting equipment than beloved members of the family, hunting hounds often live in pens or are tethered outdoors. They may become lost in the chase and are sometimes never recovered. They may be struck by vehicles, die as a result of dehydration or confrontations with wildlife, or be abandoned at local animal shelters. Shelters can be overburdened with abandoned hunting dogs, particularly in rural areas during and at the end of the hunting season.

### IT'S NOT REAL HUNTING – THERE IS NO FAIR CHASE.

**MYTH:** *Bear baiting is a tradition in Maine.*

**FACT:** **Bear baiting only became popular in the 1970s.** There is nothing traditional about dumping millions of pounds of donuts, pizza, and rotting meat each year into Maine's otherwise pristine wilderness for the purpose of luring a bear in for an easy trophy kill. Bait sites are regularly stocked for a month or more and bears become accustomed to visiting the 55-gallon drums filled with high-calorie food.

The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW) sternly warns the public to keep food away from bears. Dumping these unnatural attractants habituates bears to human food and smells, increasing the likelihood of human-

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/19/AR2007051900315.html>

bear conflicts. The junk food piles unnaturally concentrate wildlife species, increasing the likelihood of spreading disease. **Since 1975, when baiting became popular, Maine's bear population has grown by 253%.<sup>2</sup>**

In Maine, no other big game species, including moose or deer, can be baited. There is no fair chase in bear baiting.

**MYTH: Hounding is a natural, traditional form of hunting.**

**FACT: Bear hounding uses high-tech, unsporting equipment that violates traditional hunting ethics, giving all hunting a bad image.** There is nothing "natural" or traditional about releasing packs of dogs outfitted with GPS devices to run down bears. There is no sport involved in following a GPS signal with a handheld computer to find frightened and exhausted bears and shooting them off tree limbs. Montana, the state with the second largest state hunting participation rate of any state in the nation, has prohibited the use of dogs to hunt bear since 1921, boasting that it "offers world renowned, fair-chase black bear hunting."<sup>3</sup>

**MYTH: Maine's woods are too thick to hunt bears without bait or hounds.**

**FACT: Instead of dogs wearing high-tech collars and piles of bait, Maine bear hunters will simply use more traditional scouting techniques, monitoring areas of natural food availability and stalk or stand hunting.** Tom Beck, retired bear biologist with the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Department states: "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."<sup>4</sup>

## **IT'S SCIENTIFICALLY INDEFENSIBLE.**

**MYTH: We need aggressive hunting practices to manage the bear population. If we outlaw hounding and baiting, the bear population will explode.**

**FACT: Hound hunting, baiting and trapping are not needed to control the bear population.** Human-bear conflicts are most often caused by garbage and other attractants being made available to bears, and sport hunting does nothing to prevent such conflicts.

Other states that opted to prohibit baiting, hounding, and trapping have maintained relatively stable bear populations and nuisance complaint levels. In Oregon, where hounding and baiting were prohibited via ballot measure in 1994, the number of nuisance complaints reported the year prior to the ballot measure (436) is virtually identical to the number of complaints (457) lodged in 2011, the most recent year for which data is available. The average number of annual complaints in all the years since voters approved the ban for which data is available (1994-2011) is 495 complaints,<sup>5</sup> despite the fact that Oregon's human population has increased by roughly a million people during that same time. Oregon's bear population has remained stable at around 25-30,000 bears since the ban.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife data.

<sup>3</sup> Foreword, "Black Bear Harvest Research and Management in Montana: 2011 Final Report." Mace, Richard D. and Tonya Chilton-Radant. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Wildlife Division. Retrieved June 01 2013 from <http://fwp.mt.gov/fwpDoc.html?id=50731>.

<sup>4</sup> Williams, Ted. 2005. "Bad News Bear Hunters." *Audubon Magazine*. Retrieved June 10 2013 from: <http://archive.audubonmagazine.org/incite/incite0509.html>

<sup>5</sup> 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](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/management_plans/docs/Black_Bear_Management_Plan_2012.pdf).

In Washington, where baiting and hounding were prohibited in 1996, the bear population (25-30,000) and nuisance complaints (300-500 annually) have also remained relatively stable, even though the state's human population has increased from around 5 million in 1996 to nearly 7 million in 2011.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, if hounding, baiting and trapping are prohibited and fair-chase is restored to the sport, it's likely there will be more bear hunters in the long term. States like Oregon, Washington, and Colorado have seen a substantial long-term growth in the number of bear hunters and higher bear harvests following the ban.

**MYTH: Hound hunting and baiting are more selective practices because houndsmen and bait hunters can better determine sex and age of a treed bear before killing the animal.**

**FACT: This is completely false. Hound and bait hunters are no better than other hunters in determining the sex and age of a bear.** When a bear is dozens of feet up a tree, often with the view obstructed by tree branches and leaves, it is very difficult to get a good look at the bear. One researcher studying Maine bear hunting methods "suggested that it was difficult for even experienced observers to judge the size of a treed bear, so that hound hunting was not necessarily more selective for males."<sup>7</sup> Studies show that in viewing bears, there is no discernible difference between a lactating female or non-lactating female. Sows hold very little milk and it's even difficult for a biologist handling a dead bear at a check-in station to tell whether the female bear has cubs.<sup>8</sup>

Nursing female black bears often forage at great distances from their cubs. When pursued by hounds, the female bear usually leaves the cubs in a tree and continues eluding the hounds. When she trees, she is seldom with her cubs.<sup>9</sup> Dewey McGowen, a former bear hunting guide who is currently employed in the hunting industry, observed in a recently published article that **since the state of Oregon prohibited the use of hounds to pursue bears, fewer bears with cubs are killed.** He explained: "When a mom bear is threatened, she will chase her cubs up a tree to come back for them later. When hounds are chasing the bear, the mom hides the cubs and gets treed herself. So when the hunter sees a bear in the tree, it is hard to tell if she has cubs or not."<sup>10</sup>

Data confirm that fair chase bear hunting can, in fact, be more selective with fewer female bears killed. In Washington, **fewer female bears were killed in the five years after the ban on baiting and hounding than the five years before the ban.**<sup>11</sup> **Oregon followed the same trend after their ban.** Oregon data also shows that allowing baiting and hounding had no impact on hunters' ability to determine the age of a bear—there was no change in the median age of harvested bears after the ban.<sup>12</sup>

**MYTH: Hounding, baiting, and trapping help resolve human-wildlife conflicts by tracking down problem wild animals who threaten public safety or livestock.**

**FACT: Taking of bears for depredation purposes is a completely different type of activity toward which hunting contributes little if anything.** Hunters typically target bears deep in the woods, not those coming into contact with human populations. Hounding, baiting, and trapping do not address human-wildlife conflicts, which are most often caused by garbage and other attractants being made available to bears.<sup>13</sup> **In fact, bear baiting can exacerbate human-bear conflict by habituating bears to human foods.** Bear baiters set up dump sites in the woods for bears – dumping meat parts, donuts, grease and other food waste – and then shoot the animals while they feed. All professional wildlife

<sup>6</sup> 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>

<sup>7</sup> Elowe, K.D. 1990. Bear hunting with hounds: techniques and effects on bears and the public. Proceedings of the Eastern Workshop on Black Bear Research and Management 10:101-109. Quote from Boulay et. al., p. 183.

<sup>8</sup> *Western Black Bear workshop, "Sociological and ethical considerations of black bear hunting," 1995.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.wenatcheeworld.com/news/2012/aug/25/bears-abundant-but-hunt-not-easy/>

<sup>11</sup> Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2008. 2009-2015 Game Management Plan. Wildlife Program, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Olympia, Washington, USA.

<sup>12</sup> 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](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/management_plans/docs/Black_Bear_Management_Plan_2012.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> For example see a recent Wisconsin study by Treves, A., K. Kapp and D.M. MacFarland that found "hunting does not reduce future nuisance complaints." Source: "American black bear nuisance complaints and hunter take." *Ursus* 21(1):30-42 (2010), p. 38.

managers discourage people from feeding bears, but Maine makes an exception for thousands of hunters who dump tons of human foods into the woods and habituate bears to human food sources. In order to avoid creating nuisance bears, the first step is to forbid trophy hunters from turning the Maine woods into a dump site.

**MYTH: *This initiative would prevent people from being able to protect themselves, pets, beehives, crops, livestock, or property.***

**FACT: Under Maine law (Title 12 §12401) people are already allowed to kill any wild animal that is attacking or “worrying” domestic animals or private property.** Title 12 §12402 also allows take of bears that are damaging crops or orchards. Title 12 §12404 allow the commissioner to issue a permit to “*protect beehives that are being damaged by bear.*” This section also allows the commissioner to suspend game laws related to bears in certain areas to address bear “damage” to crops or corn. The proposed ballot initiative leaves all these existing laws in place. Also, under the act, state or federal government employees working in their official capacity could take a specific “offending” bear where necessary via baiting, hunting with dogs, or trapping in response to a “*bona fide threat to, livestock, domestic animals, threatened or endangered wildlife, or public safety.*”

**MYTH: *This bill would prohibit the use of baiting and hounding in research.***

**FACT: This initiative specifically exempts the use of such techniques for valid research purposes.**

**MYTH: *Bear hounding, baiting, and trapping are vital to the state’s rural economy.***

**FACT: More people come to Maine to watch wildlife than to kill it.** More than 400,000 people travel to Maine every year to view wildlife, spending more than \$500 million to do so.<sup>14</sup> Wildlife watching tourists in Maine outnumber tourist hunters by more than 10 to 1 and outspend them by more than 11 to 1.<sup>15</sup>

**Furthermore, when other states have prohibited hounding and baiting, interest in fair-chase bear hunting actually increases.** For example, since Oregon prohibited bear 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.<sup>16</sup> In Washington, the number of bear tags sold has more than quadrupled and the number of bear licenses sold in Colorado has more than tripled since the state prohibited baiting and hounding.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/fhw11-me.pdf> (U.S. Fish and Wildlife National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Related Recreation, 2011)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/fhw11-me.pdf> (U.S. Fish and Wildlife National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Related Recreation, 2011)

<sup>16</sup> Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Data, obtained through record request.

<sup>17</sup> Data provided by state wildlife agencies. Revenue for WA and OR refer to all bear hunting license sales, including combination licenses for bears and other species.