

March 20, 2021

To The N.H. Fish & Game Commission,

I am writing to express my concerns on your policy regarding the hunting season on bears, in particular, last year's record kill.

I love bears; all species, but particularly black bears. And I am unapologetic about it.



Black bears are intelligent, curious, non-threatening apex predators that are indicators of forest ecosystem health. Like all apex predators, their presence or absence has a cascading impact on ALL trophic levels in a forest ecosystem.

Their presence has a positive impact in that they alter the browsing behavior of herbivores, keeping them on the move so they don't "camp out" and over feed on hardwood regeneration for valuable commercial species like white ash, sugar maple, birches and basswood. They undoubtedly have a positive impact on species composition and quality of forest

regeneration. When regeneration is over browsed, we get low-value beech and red maple instead.



Young cubs are under their mother's protective AND instructive care for two years, so they can learn what high value foods to eat in each of the seasons; where to find escape cover; where and when to den; and equally important: how to DEAL with humans.

Cubs learn to move through the woods following their mothers, learning to augment that information with their own experiences. With each generation, there is an incremental increase in knowledge. When older adults are killed, the family is robbed of their memory and accumulated knowledge of the landscape and the bear population can suffer.

You can imagine my horror at seeing last fall's headlines *that "Vermont, NH report big boom in bear harvest"*. What is NOT included in the "harvest" report is the number of cubs that are orphaned. With every adult female killed by hunters, we run the risk of losing 1, 2, 3+ orphaned cubs that suffer a fate of malnourishment and trauma, hence: the mortality of bears is further increased.



The NH Fish & Game proclaims how great the 2020 bear hunt was, where a record 1,183 black bears were killed, a 42% increase over the previous 5-year average. Vermont followed with a record 914 bears killed, a 22% increase over 2019 "harvest".

Instead of boasting about record kills, perhaps you should make a better effort to value their role in maintaining the ecosystem functions that sustain the yield of forest products that generates money so private landowners can keep their land forested as habitat for all wildlife, instead of being fragmented and sold for house lots.

The disturbing part about the record 1,183 bears that were killed is the fact 75% were taken using methods other than "fair chase": 64% were taken over bait and 9.5% by hounding!

If hunters feel compelled to hunt bears (I say there is good scientific reasoning not to), please level the playing field AND implement the practices of "FAIR CHASE"!

To do that, the NH F & G Dept. should: **ban baiting** (as it habituates bears to human food and it is like shooting fish in a barrel); **ban hounding** (it is cruel to bears, it separates young from mothers, other species of wildlife are harassed, and trespass occurs on private lands' even when posted); and **ban the use of any and all gadgets** like GPS tracking, digital cameras, cell phones, calling devices, and rifles loaded with magazines and laser scopes, etc.). Lastly: please shorten the season!

Think these concepts are too radical to work? Of the 27 states that allow bear hunting in the U.S., 15 have learned to manage their bear populations without allowing baiting; and 13 states have banned hounding! It's called adaptive management strategy. When we are operating with lots of unknown variables, don't you think it's best to err on the side of caution???



Wildlife management needs to emerge from the shadows of the 1930's philosophy and adopt practices in keeping with modern wildlife science, as well as principles regarding the ethical treatment of animals.

To do that, the NH F & G should revise its policies so that "management is **for** wildlife, as opposed to management **of** wildlife", a subtle yet significant shift.

Implementing the concepts of “fair chase” would be a proper step in that direction!

Respectfully Submitted,



Geoffrey T. Jones, Stoddard, N.H.

*Licensed professional forester; former board member of the NH Wildlife Federation (1980-88), current member of the NH Wildlife Coalition, and the chair of the Stoddard Conservation Commission.*



*Photos by G.T.Jones*