



CT Coalition to Protect Black Bears



The CT Coalition to Protect Bears formed in 2021 because of misleading messaging circulating about black bears in Connecticut, including that they need to be managed with a bear hunt. Comprised of leading advocacy groups, the coalition is dedicated to ongoing educational outreach and legislative advocacy. Our goal is to promote proven non-lethal strategies that allow people and Connecticut's native black bears to co-exist peacefully.

Black bears play an important role in the forest ecosystem, particularly as seed dispersers. They are slow to reproduce; their population is self-regulating based on food availability and social hierarchy. Studies have shown time and again that it is food availability, not bear population numbers, that lead to negative human-bear interactions.

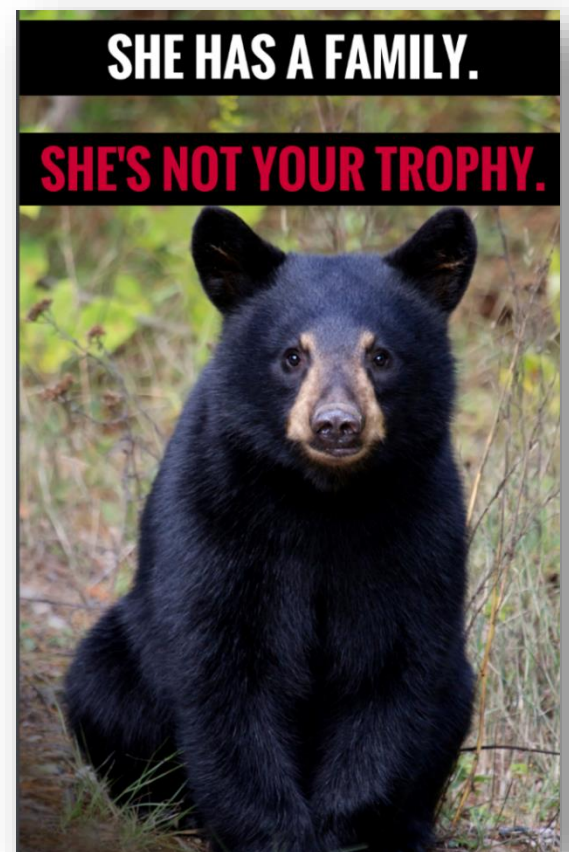
THE TRUTH MATTERS

For years, our state Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) has been advocating for hunting while doing insufficient public education about coexisting with bears. Now the agency is advocating for hunting to mitigate conflicts despite the fact that researchers in other states like Wisconsin, Minnesota, Colorado, Ontario and BC Canada have found that hunts do not reduce nuisance complaints. The reason is bears killed deep in the woods are not the bears who people complain about in more developed areas, where hunting wouldn't even be safe. One large study stated:

"We found no significant correlations between harvest and subsequent HBC [human-bear conflicts]. Although it may be intuitive to assume that harvesting more bears should reduce HBC, empirical support for this assumption is lacking despite considerable research (Garshelis 1989, Treves & Karanth 2003, Huygens et al. 2004, Tavss 2005, Treves 2009, Howe et al. 2010, Treves et al. 2010)."

Furthermore, DEEP has authority to kill any bear that comes in conflict with humans. Hunters going into the woods to kill bears for recreation will not solve the problem of bears habituated to humans, and will leave many orphaned cubs too young to survive on their own.

Non-lethal community-based solutions are effective in mitigating human-bear interactions. Our state needs to invest in common-sense solutions and ensure we are properly protecting this important wild species. Find out more at www.ctbears.org



BEAR SIGHTINGS

Every sighting of a black bear doesn't mean it's a different bear.

A bear ambling through a neighborhood will be reported many times, and that same bear is likely to be reported multiple times. This was confirmed by a 2014 UConn study, which found that although there were several thousand sightings in the northwest corner of the state, only 235 were unique bears. **No population study has been done since the 2014 study.**

Sightings do not equal population, yet DEEP is often conflating sightings with population in furtherance of promoting a hunting agenda.



STOP TRASHING BEARS

Of CT's bear "conflict" reported in 2022

- 1,234 involved trash cans
- 796 involved bird feeders
- 181 involved livestock or beehives

Bears come into conflict with humans because we give them a reason to. **A bear hunt won't stop this.** Success in preventing bear/human encounters depends on changing human behavior.

KILLER FRIENDS of ANIMALS

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BEAR POPULATION GROWTH and CONFLICTS

DEEP's growth estimates are largely based on sightings and modeling. As a top species, the black bear population is not controlled by predators. The bear population is controlled largely by food availability and social hierarchy.

If the number of bears in the state is actually increasing (there has been no bear population density study made public by DEEP since 2016, and requests for how they have arrived at the 1,000-1,200 estimated bears have gone unanswered)—there's no need to have a shoot-first mentality.

Scientific studies show there is a weak correlation between the population of bears and bear-human interactions. Bear-human conflict is more closely correlated with human behavior, according to studies published in [The Journal of Wildlife Management](#). Some states with large black bear populations have fewer incidents than states with much smaller bear numbers, according to the [Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies report called "Human Black Bear Conflicts."](#) For example, Florida, with an estimated 3,000 bears, reported more than 5,000 incidents. Georgia, with more than 5,000 bears, reported about 1,500 incidents.

In DEEP's own briefing, titled "The State of the Bears," Massachusetts has four times the number of bears as CT but far fewer conflicts. Connecticut needs to do a better job educating people on how to co-exist with bears.

The CT Coalition to Protect Bears can't emphasize enough that almost invariably human-bear conflicts are due to people allowing bears to gain access to food. Bears are smart and adaptable and modify their behavior to take advantage of their environment. They learn from experience, and the outcome of that experience will change future behavior: **positive experience** = a food reward; **negative experience** = no food reward and/or negative stimuli or interaction. For example, if bears look for and find food in populated areas, and encounter no hazing or negative consequences, habituation and food-conditioning of the bear may occur (*Hristienko and McDonald 2007*). People are responsible for increased human-bear conflicts by allowing bears to become conditioned to human-associated food sources.

DEEP has done little since 2014 in terms of systemic nonlethal measures such as prohibiting bird feeders March-November or helping municipalities secure bear-resistant trash cans.

REPORTS OF BEAR CONFLICTS / BEARS IN HOUSES

There's good reason CT residents saw a lot of bears in 2022. Bears depend on acorns, hickory nuts, hazelnuts, beechnuts and berries to fatten up for winter – yet these food items fluctuate, and only produce bumper crops every 2-5 years. Unfortunately, this summer and fall, **ALL the bears' favorite nut trees and fruits had poor fruit production, which meant the bears were extra hungry and had to wander far and wide for food.**

Bears rely on their sense of smell to survive and can smell food from great distances. We need to make sure they do not find easy meals. Keeping bear-accessible windows and garage doors closed and locked will keep bears out and teach them to go elsewhere.





THE “BEAR SMART” COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTION

There's no need to reinvent the wheel! Bearsmart (www.bearsmart.com) provides working templates for any community (or state) that wants to resolve human-bear conflicts. Bearsmart programs focus on proper problem assessment and match it with a blueprint for addressing bear conflicts, such as template bear-proof municipal waste planning documents, feeding bans, and successful public education and outreach programs to eliminate food attractants.

Bearsmart programs have proven successful wherever they are implemented, with dramatic declines in bear-human issues. Communities like Whistler BC have had a program in place since 1995 and now coexist peacefully with bears. These programs work because they are comprehensive and tackle the root cause of the problem: i.e. the food enticements that people intentionally or unintentionally provide.

Anyone can visit the **Bearsmart** website (www.bearsmart.com) and see comprehensive templates for bear conflict management, public education materials, model ordinances, solid waste management plans, and other relevant resources. It can be done!



CONFLICT REPORTS

DEEP's reporting on two high profile conflicts in 2022 is misleading. Crucial details in the Newtown and Morris incident and police reports, obtained via the Freedom of Information Act, underscore that these serious incidents were preventable and should be teaching moments.

- **There was no bear attack in Newtown.** DEEP's incident report states clearly that Lawrence Clarke's son and grandson were safe inside the house when he gunned down black bear #217, known locally as "Bobbi," with his AR-15 rifle. The report describes how the mother bear ran into the woods after Clarke yelled at her when she first sauntered onto his property. It is unclear how long before she returned, baited by Clarke's unprotected chicken coop, and allegedly attempted to pull it over. Clarke, a police officer, went in and out of his house multiple times, yelling at and confronting her, without calling our state wildlife agency as policy stipulates if residents are concerned about encounters with wildlife. If a person goes into a house to retrieve a gun, it is impossible for a bear to still be an imminent threat.

The last time Clarke came out of his house armed with his AR-15, Clarke claims that he pursued Bobbi, shot her in the head, and, after she fell to the ground, finished her off with 7 or 8 more rounds. (Clarke seems to have tampered with evidence by picking up shell casings.) This all occurred just 103 yards away from the closest house, which suggests Clarke violated Newtown's gun ordinance which prohibits shooting a gun within 500 feet of another building.

- In Morris, when police arrived on the scene, **the bear was actively eating trash** that had been dragged along the wood line on a separate occasion. Unfortunately, most people know bears eagerly take advantage of food sources but they ignore the problem - or even take videos and photos. This allows bears to learn there are no negative consequences, and to no longer see humans as a threat. They are more likely to keep coming back and stand their ground.

Bear Specialist's response to Morris incident: "You cannot manage for a random chance event, even in a scorched-earth approach—which hopefully nobody would advocate for. A hunt would be unlikely to target an individual(s) visiting residential areas, as shooting restrictions that close to dwellings are numerous. We have had this discussion numerous times about what a hunt can and cannot address - and while it can show that an agency is listening to public concerns, we also need to be honest about managing expectations and not over-promise what the result will be.

"If I wanted my agency's money and attention used in the best possible way to resolve the root cause of conflict over the long term, and not just put a band-aid on a bullet hole so to speak, it would be spending the time/energy/resources in working with city and county officials on removing attractants on the landscape, modifying garbage contracts to mandate bear-resistant containers, implementing ordinances on feeding wildlife (including birds, deer, etc), and partnering on outreach/education programs. That, I am quite certain, would not only work, but would reduce the likelihood of this kind of thing from happening in the future by keeping the two species separated in their own habitats."

—Rich Beausoleil, bear specialist from the Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife and co-chair, North American Bears Expert Team, International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Bear Specialist Group

SCIENCE DOES NOT SUPPORT HUNTING

Numerous studies underscore that hunting doesn't effectively resolve human-bear conflicts:

“Human-bear conflict was not correlated with prior harvest, providing no evidence that larger harvest reduced subsequent human-bear conflicts.”

- OBBARD, M.E., HOWE, E.J, WALL, L.L, ALLISON B, BLACK R, DAVIS P, et al. 2014. Relationships among food availability, harvest, and human–bear conflict at landscape scales in Ontario, Canada. *Ursus*; 25:98–110

“To assess the effectiveness of black bear hunting as a conflict reduction strategy, we analyzed hunter take relative to 10 years of complaints (in WI)...we examined whether years with fewer nuisance complaints followed years of higher hunter take. We found no evidence of such a relationship.

- TREVES, A, K.J. KAPP, AND D.M. MACFARLAND. 2010. American black bear nuisance complaints and hunter take. *Ursus* 21:30–42.

“Indeed, although numerous approaches for reducing human-bear conflicts have been implemented with mixed success (e.g., increased harvest, translocation, hazing), bear-proofing efforts have repeatedly exhibited desired reductions in black and brown bear conflicts (Gunther 1994, Gniadek and Kendall 1998, Tavss 2005, Barrett et al. 2014).”

- JOHNSON, HE, LEWIS, DL, LISCHKA, SA, AND BRECK, SW. (2018), Assessing ecological and social outcomes of a bear-proofing experiment. *Jour. Wild. Mgmt.*, 82: 1102-1114. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jwmg.21472>

This study analyzed data and reported that many states (VA, PA, MN, NY and Ontario) with ongoing bear hunting seasons also had increasing bear-human conflicts. It was only when non-lethal programs were put in place to reduce food attractants that human-bear conflicts declined.

- TAVSS, E. A. 2005. Correlation of reduction in nuisance black bear complaints with implementation of a) a non-violent program and b) a hunt. Final Report. New Jersey Public Hearing on the Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy. Rutgers, the State University of NJ, New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA.

“Consequently, human food conditioning by black bears, and unsecured foods and edible garbage are root cause of human-bear conflicts, and are also the primary factors that can be managed to facilitate coexistence.”

- JAMSHID , PARCHIZADEH, K F KELLNER, JE HURST, DW KRAMER, JL BELANT. 2023. Factors influencing frequency and severity of human-American black bear conflicts in New York, USA. *Plos One*, 18(2).



HUNTING DOESN'T SOLVE HUMAN-BEAR INTERACTIONS

Hunts may INCREASE human-bear interactions: A 2022 study found that even with significant hunting harvests, “...there was no concomitant reduction in interactions or incidents and, in fact, these were higher in areas with the new spring season relative to control areas.” (Joseph Northrup et al., *Experimental Test of the Efficacy of Hunting for Controlling Human-Wildlife Conflict*, 6th International Human-Bear Conflict Workshop (Lake Tahoe, NV: www.humanbearconflicts.org, 2022))

New Jersey Dept. of Fish and Wildlife Black Bear Activity reports show black bear activity increased in 2011 and 2014 when hunts were occurring and the incidents of bears getting into garbage cans and feeders essentially stayed the same from 2010-2018.

Current state statute already allows DEEP to kill a bear if there is a public health or safety threat (CGS 26-3). This makes a recreational hunt unnecessary.

In 2020 three bears were killed by DEEP after entering homes and one was killed for livestock depredation. Another was killed due to immobility/neurological distress. And one from complications due to chemical immobilization. In 2021, three were killed for entering homes and one for exhibiting aggressive behavior towards humans. Another was killed due to injuries from a motor vehicle strike. In 2022, three bears were killed for entering homes; two for immobility/neurological distress and one bear due to complications related to anesthesia.





CT RESIDENTS FAVOR NON-LETHAL SOLUTIONS

The American Wildlife Values Study found that the people of Connecticut desire humane solutions, and also found DEEP's culture to be misaligned with the values of the people of Connecticut. See <https://sites/warnercnr.colostate.edu/wildlifevalues>.

The CT Coalition to Protect Black Bears supports statewide legislation that provides funding to farmers and a wildlife feeding ban. It would also create a conflict-reduction community grant program that provides funding to farmers and communities for bear damage prevention, like bear-resistant trash cans and electric fencing around chickens and beehives. It is critical that CT residents do not unintentionally lure bears to their yards with their bird feeders, trash, and other food attractants, especially in the fall when bears are going through hyperphagia, the period before hibernation when they must gain 20-40 pounds a week.

A recent poll found that CT voters want orphaned cubs to be treated humanely, including rehabilitation if they are too young to survive on their own. Yet DEEP's policy stipulates that orphaned bear cubs under 6 months old or 60 pounds should be euthanized (DEEP Black Bear Response Guidelines, June 2015).

On average, CT towns that already have implemented wildlife feeding ordinances have already seen reduced incidents between bears and bird feeders, according to DEEP's own report.

SUCCESS STORIES

- In 2013, with grant money from the State Parks and Wildlife Department, Durango, Colo. distributed bear-resistant trash containers throughout two “treatment” areas, while monitoring two paired “control” areas. The experiment found a 60 percent reduction in scattering of trash by wildlife in the treated areas. And bear-related calls within Durango dropped to 497, a 61 percent reduction. The city has since started distributing automatic bear-resistant trash cans to city residents living in other hot-spot areas.
- Incidences of bears obtaining human-related food in Denali National Park, Alaska decreased 96% when hikers were provided with bear-resistant containers for food storage (Schirokauer and Boyd 1998).
- The NY Dept. of Environmental Conservation and the Wildlife Conservation Society worked together to resolve bear conflicts in the backcountry of the Adirondack Park. In 2005, a regulation mandated bear-resistant canisters in one highly used area. The combination of education, enforcement of the regulation, and providing proper food storage options to backpackers resulted in a dramatic reduction in bear encounters and human-bear conflicts.
- Between 2007-2019, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission provided almost \$2.1 million to offset the cost of bear-resistant containers in 16 counties with the highest levels of human-bear interactions. Seminole County adopted its wildlife ordinance in 2016, requiring residents to secure refuse in a shed, garage or other secured structure on non-collection days, and to not place it curbside before 5 a.m. on collection days unless it is in a bear-resistant container has to be used if trash is put out earlier. The immediate result was a significant reduction of conflict calls.



- In 2014, Yosemite National Park reported a 92% decrease in human-bear conflicts due to public education and garbage/food containment programs.

A COMPREHENSIVE BEAR-SMART APPROACH:

Effective community-based solutions should emphasize:

- The role of black bears in our local ecology;
- Not feeding bears - intentionally or unintentionally;
- Proper compost containment;
- Removing food attractants (garbage, bird feeders from March through November, pet food, food waste, etc.);

- Protecting beehives, chickens and livestock with electric barriers and other deterrents;
- Waiting to put garbage cans out until the morning of pick-up and using bear-proof containers and dumpsters.

- Making bears uncomfortable in your yard with aversive conditioning— persistent loud noises with an air horn, hand clapping or yelling to teach bears leave the area and avoid it in the future;

- Posting signs on state hiking trails, advising hikers of what to do in case of bear encounters; Keeping dogs supervised and leashed while hiking;
- Training of first responders.

The CT Coalition to Protect Black Bears is dedicated to educational outreach and legislative advocacy on proven non-lethal strategies that keep bears wild and people safe.



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