



The truth about CT's black bears

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 are crucial to the forest ecosystem. They help regulate insect populations, disperse seeds, open canopies and amend soils. They are slow to reproduce, and their numbers are not large enough to survive a sustained hunt. Studies have shown time and again that it is food availability, not bear population numbers, that cause negative human-bear interactions.

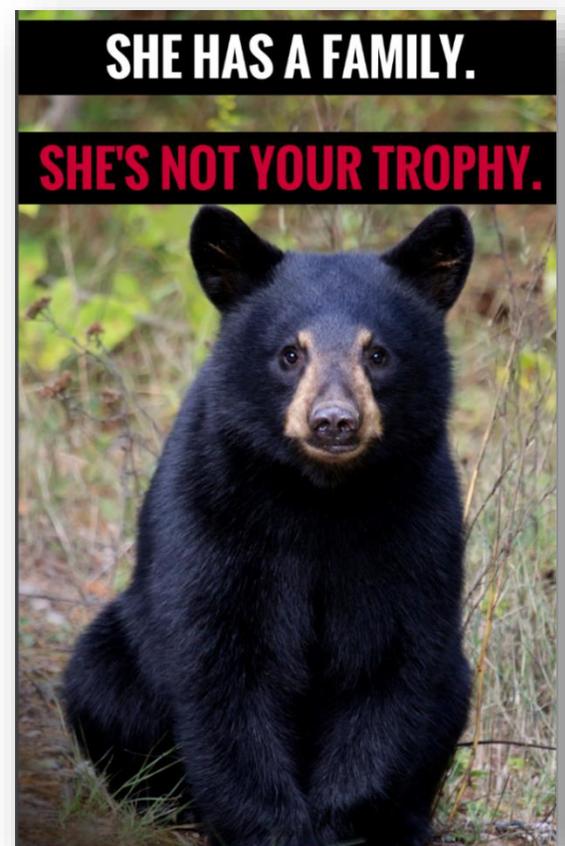
THE TRUTH MATTERS

Until recently, our state Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) has done very little public education when it comes to living with bears, and now the agency advocates for hunting to mitigate interactions despite the fact that researchers in other states like Wisconsin 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.

“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 and Karanth 2003, Huygens et al. 2004, Tavss 2005, Treves 2009, Howe et al. 2010, Treves et al. 2010*).”

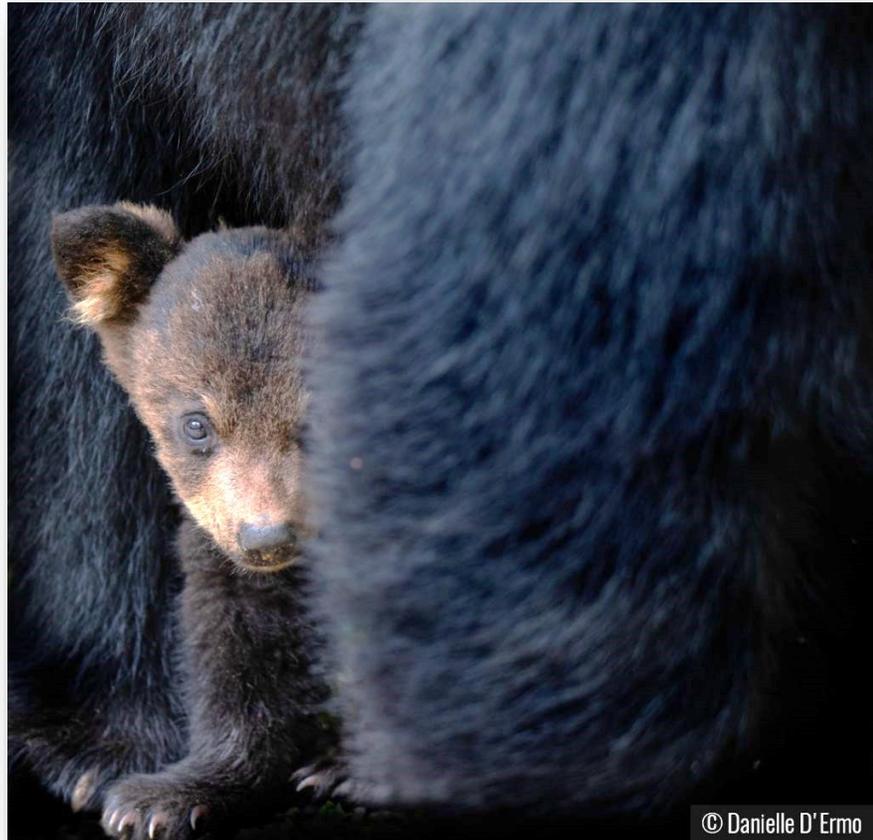
Furthermore, DEEP has authority to kill any bear that comes in conflict with humans. Hunters going into the woods to kill bears for recreation will not solve the problem of bears habituated to humans.

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. Hunting bears will also orphan many cubs. DEEP's misguided policies on bear cubs has led to unnecessary suffering of cubs too young to be on their own.



BEAR SIGHTINGS

Every sighting of a black bear doesn't mean it's a different bear. For example, DEEP received more than 4,600 reports of black bear sightings in 2014. Yet that year the UCONN study the agency commissioned (which is the last population study that was ever made public) collected 734 different hair samples in the northwestern part of the state where "hair corrals" were set up, and only 235 of those were unique bears.



BEAR RANGE

What was notable about the 2014 study, which was published in 2016, is that UCONN ecologist Tracy Rittenhouse found that Connecticut's black bears and residents like to live in the same places, which is in closer proximity to humans than expected—hence increased sightings.

The highest concentrations of bears in CT are in areas where housing density is between 6 and 50 homes per square kilometer, researchers found. And DEEP encourages residents to report every sighting.

Most existing research about American black bears indicates they prefer rural areas, and it's the amount of forest in those regions that determines the bear population density. But that literature is generated largely in western states like Colorado and Wyoming. This new information shows that Connecticut bears—and likely bears throughout the more heavily populated Northeast – are different. They are adjusting to living in a habitat shared with humans.

DEEP has failed to use this data to help local town managers anticipate areas of possible bear habitat, and thereby allow them to plan better for future development and alert residents accordingly. The agency has done nothing since 2014 in terms of systemic nonlethal measures such as prohibiting bird feeders March-November or helping municipalities secure bear-resistant trash cans.

CT's POPULATION GROWTH

CT experienced a 0.9% growth in human population from 2010 to 2020, reaching 3,605,944 residents. Connecticut has a very small land mass—just 5,543 square miles. As a result, there are 738.1 people for every square mile, and this ranks Connecticut at 4th place in terms of population density.



BEAR POPULATION GROWTH

DEEP's growth estimates are largely based on sightings and modeling and likely to underestimate cub mortality and growth rate variation based on food availability, disease and other sources of mortality. As a top species, the black bear population is controlled naturally by habitat and social interactions, not predators.

If the number of bears in the state is actually increasing (there has been no bear 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, which had an estimated 3,000 bears, reported more than 5,000 incidents. And Georgia, which had more than 5,000 bears, reported about 1,500 incidents. Alaska, with 100,000 bears, reported just over 1,100 incidents.

In DEEP's own briefing "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 almost invariably human-bear conflicts are due to people allowing bears to gain access to food. Bears are adaptable and modify their behavior to take advantage of their environment. They learn from experience, and the outcome of that experience (positive = a food reward or negative = no reward or negative stimuli) will change future behavior. For example, if the feeding of bears in urban areas results in little or 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 food sources we provide.

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 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. That's why screened-in porches and open windows won't prevent bears from smelling what's on the menu at someone's house—whether it's suet cakes on a porch or a pie baking in a kitchen.

Keeping bear-accessible windows closed and locked and garage doors closed and locked will keep bears out. People like doors with lever handles because they're stylish and easy to open. Bears only care about the easy-to-open part. It's important to keep doors locked or replace lever handles with sturdy round knobs.

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.

KILLERS
FRIENDS
of ANIMALS



If sows don't have enough fat reserves for winter, their embryos will not implant and grow. It's how they self-regulate their own numbers.

Of all the bear "conflict" reports from 2022, 796 involved bird feeders, 1,234 involved trash cans, 146 involved livestock and 35 involved beehives. And most of the 67 black bear home entries reported were bears responding to the scent of a food attractant, according to a Freedom of Information request. The details of these reports matter.





BEARS COME INTO CONFLICT WITH PEOPLE BECAUSE WE GIVE THEM A REASON TO.

DEEP is misleading the public into thinking slaughtering some bears would stop rising instances of habituation. The agency has been inconsistent with its messaging, often acknowledging education is critical in reversing the habituation trend. The truth is success in preventing bears from snooping around our neighborhoods and losing their wariness of people depends on changing human behavior. A cruel, random, recreational bear hunt will never stop bears from being curious, opportunistic feeders.

***“You are correct in that a lot of what we are seeing this year is driven by habituation, and public education is critical in reversing that trend. Our recent press release was focused on what we can do to learn to live with bears and to avoid teaching them bad behavior.*”**

***Many of the home entries this year have been bears responding to the scent of a food attractant of one form or another. Some may have been avoided by modifying behavior such as where and how people store seed or suet cakes, but it is also a problem that has grown over time as bears get used to finding human-associated food, learn bad behavior, and in many cases teach that bad behavior to their offspring. That does still tie back to changing our behavior, but a bear that has already learned to associate humans with food and has become increasingly bold around humans will actively seek out sources of food, so it is almost a two-fold problem. We need to try to stop the behavior before it can become learned or worse, passed on to the next generation of bears. That is where people can really help by becoming “Bear Aware.”*”**

—Jenny Dickson, Director, CT DEEP Wildlife Division, 9/16/21

CONFLICT REPORTS

DEEP's reporting that CT experienced two bear attacks on humans in 2022 is misleading. There are crucial details in the Newtown and Morris incident and police reports, obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests, that underscore that these unfortunate incidents were indeed preventable and should be used as teaching moments.

- 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 that bears will eagerly take advantage of food sources but look away or even take videos and photos until one of those bear visits results in property damage or injury. By then the bears have learned there are no negative consequences, no longer see humans as a threat and are more likely to keep coming back, stand their ground or even approach.

- **There was no bear attack in Newtown.** The incident report from DEEP clearly states that Lawrence Clarke's son and grandson were safe inside the house when he gunned down the black bear locally known as Bobbi with his AR-15 rifle. In fact, the report describes how Bobbi ran off into the woods after Clarke yelled at her when she first sauntered onto his property. It is unclear how long it took before Bobbi returned, baited by Clarke's unprotected chicken coop, allegedly attempting to pull it over. But it is clear that Clarke went in and out of his house multiple times yelling at and confronting Bobbi without ever bothering to call our state wildlife agency as policy stipulates if residents are concerned about encounters with wildlife.

The last time Clarke came out of his house armed with his AR-15, he pursued Bobbi, firing a bullet that hit her in the head. After Bobbi fell to the ground, he finished her off with 7 or 8 more rounds. This all occurred just 103 yards away from the closest house, which suggests Clarke also violated Newtown's gun ordinance, which prohibits shooting a gun within 500 feet of another building. If a person goes into a house to retrieve a gun, it is impossible then for a bear to still be an imminent threat.



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: 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.

In 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



THIS IS A MOTHER.

NOT A MONSTER.

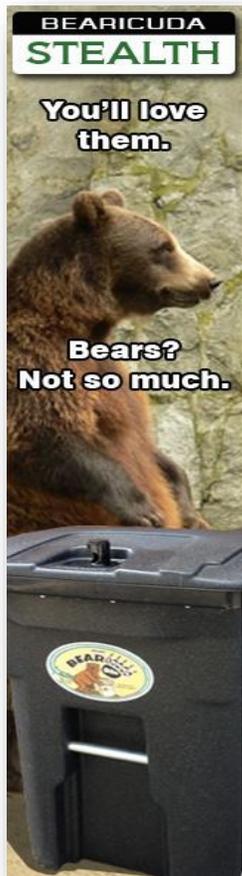
Stop the CT bear hunt.

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>.

Likewise, the CT Coalition to Protect Black Bears supports statewide legislation that includes a wildlife feeding ban and a conflict-reduction community grant program that provides funding to communities for bear-resistant trash cans and electric fencing around chickens and beehives. It is critical for CT residents not to 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.

On average the 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.



BEAR RESISTANT TRASH CAN 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 the use of 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 with 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 not to place it curbside before 5 a.m. on collection days. A bear-resistant container has to be used if trash is put out earlier. Preliminary findings show a reduction of conflict calls by 38.6 percent.

PUBLIC EDUCATION WORKS

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

- Effective community-based solutions should emphasize:
 - The vital role of black bears to our local ecology;
 - Not feeding bears intentionally or unintentionally;
 - Removing food attractants (garbage, bird feeders from March through November, pet food, 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—making loud noises with an air horn, hand clapping or yelling will teach bears to associate humans with danger and 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.

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