The Black Bear Conservation Committee (BBCC) is a broad-based coalition of concerned individuals and organizations working in a spirit of cooperation to manage and restore the Louisiana black bear to suitable habitats within its historic range. The information included in this newsletter is designed to keep those interested in this unique effort up to date with Committee progress and hopefully encourage participation from other interested parties.

Black Bear Conservation Committee
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Chairman's Comments

In October of 1990, a group of professional resource managers representing state and federal agencies, forest industry, conservation organizations, the agricultural community, and academia met in Alexandria, Louisiana, to organize the Black Bear Conservation Committee (BBCC). Their purpose was to formulate a strategy for the management and restoration of black bear in the tri-state region of Louisiana, Mississippi, and east Texas. Working together, this innovative public and private sector alliance has made tremendous progress since that initial meeting.

Highlights of the progress achieved by the BBCC to date include:

- The BBCC has raised the public's awareness of the need to actively address management and restoration of black bear. There are now over 50 member organizations in the BBCC working together to develop a management strategy that considers the needs of the bear as well as those interested parties that will be affected by a larger bear population.
- A BBCC Coordinator position has been created and staffed. Mr. Paul Davidson, BBCC Coordinator, is ably serving in an administrative and extension capacity, working with agencies, landowners, and resource managers to include black bear management in land use decisions.
- Research objectives have been identified, and the BBCC serves to coordinate regional research efforts among federal, state, private, and corporate stakeholders, thereby avoiding unnecessary duplication of effort. To date, over $600,000 has been committed to black bear research in the region.
- The BBCC has developed and published a "Black Bear Management Handbook" to assist landowners and resource managers who wish to incorporate practices that promote the black bear and its habitat into the overall management of their land.
- The BBCC has initiated development of a comprehensive restoration plan for black bear in the three state region. This plan, the initial draft of which has been completed, identifies actions that benefit the bear and its habitat, and promotes the philosophy that bear are an asset to the landowner rather than a liability.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank each of you who support, either actively or passively, the efforts of the BBCC. Though there remains much to be done, there are indications the past downward trend in bear numbers and bear-habitat can be reversed.

Current U.S. Forest Service survey data for Louisiana and Mississippi indicate a leveling off and/or reversal of the decline in forested habitat within the bear's historic range. The decline of forested habitat in the South Delta Parishes of Louisiana (i.e. Atchafalaya Basin) slowed appreciably during the last survey period, and forested acreage actually increased in the North Delta Parishes (Tenas Basin). In Mississippi, total timberland acreage increased within the historic range of the bear. Other data from both states indicate the quality of potential bear habitat is improving as (1) hardwood forests are replacing pine forests on many upland sites, (2) sawtimber acreages are increasing and (3) hardwood growing stock is increasing.

Since 1986, over 350,000 acres in the range of the bear in Mississippi and Louisiana have been restored through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Additional acres have and will be restored through other conservation initiatives such as the Wetlands Reserve Program.

Attitudes of landowners and the public in general are changing and there is growing acceptance of the black bear. The bear should be viewed as an asset, a unique and treasured wildlife heritage. People are learning that with responsible planning and management, the bear can coexist with many land uses, including forestry, agriculture and outdoor recreation.

Mississippi and Louisiana Congressional delegations have strongly supported black bear management and restoration efforts.

The public has developed a lack of tolerance for the illegal poaching of black bear. In one instance in Mississippi, hunting clubs raised a reward of several thousand dollars for the arrest and conviction of the person(s) responsible for illegally killing a black bear. Defendants of Wildlife, in cooperation with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries through Operation Game Thief, has initiated a major reward program for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone who illegally kills a Louisiana black bear. The civil penalty for killing a bear in Louisiana has been raised to $10,000 and efforts are underway to do likewise in Mississippi.

The black bear is now the official state mammal in Louisiana. Perhaps the best hope for black bear restoration in Louisiana, Mississippi and east Texas rests with the continued efforts of the Black Bear Conservation Committee. As stated in a letter from the BBCC to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: "If restoration of the black bear is to be feasible, we believe it will be through this new alliance of public and private interests working together solely for the sake of the resource and nothing else. The Black Bear Conservation Committee pledges to continue its role to that end."

More important are the attitudes of those who read this publication. The BBCC asks that you support the goal of maintaining a healthy black bear resource, and restore a truly unique and magnificent wildlife heritage. Working together, the BBCC will result in a positive situation for all stakeholders, and most importantly, for the black bear.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Lists Louisiana Bear
Final Rule Exempts Normal Forestry Management Practices

As of February 6, 1992, the Louisiana black bear (Ursus americanus luteus) has been listed as a threatened species under the authority of the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The Service also designated all free-living bears within Louisiana, southern Mississippi and eastern Texas as threatened due to similarity of appearance. The ruling includes a special rule allowing normal forestry management practices in occupied bear habitat with certain limitations.

The Service determined that the Louisiana black bear should be listed as a threatened species based on several factors, the most significant being habitat loss. The suitable habitat in the region had been reduced by 80 percent by 1980 and through the early 1980's another 165,000 acres were cleared annually. It was felt that the traumatic losses of bottomland hard

Defenders Announce Anti-Poaching Fund for Louisiana Bear

A $25,000 reward fund to combat poaching of the Louisiana black bear has been announced by the national group Defenders of Wildlife. Defenders will provide up to a $5,000 reward to any individual or group of individuals providing information leading to the conviction of poaching bears.

The reward fund is being sponsored in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries through Louisiana Operation Game Thief, and the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks. The project has been endorsed by the BBCC.

"Defenders' reward program should provide an insurance policy to discourage, and ultimately halt, the poaching of the Louisiana black bear throughout its entire range," said Roger Schlickeisen, President of Defenders of Wildlife.

BBCC Receives Conservation Awards

The Black Bear Conservation Committee has received two very prestigious conservation awards at the Louisiana Wildlife Federation annual meeting in February of 1992. The BBCC received the award for Conservation Organization of the Year for 1991. The award, part of the Governor's Awards Program, is presented to Jimmy Bullock, Chairman of the BBCC. The group had been nominated by Anderson-Tully Co., the Louisiana Forestry Association, and The Nature Conservancy of Louisiana.

Support for BBCC

Without the support of all of its members, the BBCC would not have succeeded in accomplishing what it has. The commitment and cooperation exhibited by the BBCC is unprecedented in dealing with controversial research issues, especially those concerning a federally listed species. The day to day operations of the organization also require significant financial and manpower resources. The BBCC would like to thank the numerous organizations that have donated money and time to make our efforts fruitful.

A very special thanks goes out to:

BBCC Presents Awards

The BBCC Needs Your Support

Ongoing Research on the Louisiana Black Bear

Studies. Deltec is planting marginal farmland back to bottomland hardwoods and has in place a cooperative agreement to manage some of its wetlands for waterfowl. An agricultural leader, Deltec has been incorporating minimum tillage, grassed waterways, and other farm-related conservation practices. Deltec Farm and Timber, Inc. was presented a signed limited edition black bear print drawn by Louisiana artist Albinio Hinojosa. At the May 1992 meeting of the BBCC Chairman Jimmy Bullock presented the BBCC Chairman’s Award to Dr. Bill Wall. Dr. Wall (formerly Region Wildlife Manager with International Paper in Shreveport, LA, and now Wildlife Biologist with Potlach, Inc. in Lewisport, ID) served as Chair of the BBCC Habitat/Management Subcommittee and was instrumental in the initial development of both the "Black Bear Management Handbook" and the BBCC Restoration Plan.

Successful recovery of the Louisiana black bear will be dependent on adequate knowledge of these animals, their movement behavior, choices of foraging areas, denning sites, denning chronology, and the extent of their annual ranges. Recognizing the need for this knowledge, researchers have secured funding to study black bears in the region and approximately 24 scientists are involved in these projects. Over $600,000 of the estimated 3.1 million dollars needed to fully fund these projects have been secured. Most existing data on the Louisiana black bear are from research done in the Tensas River Basin in Louisiana from 1988-90. The efforts to document the habits and characteristics of the bear in this area are continuing. Supervised by Dr. Michael Peton of the University of Tennessee, graduate student Forrest Marchinton spent the summer of 1992 trapping, collaring, and monitoring bears on a fragmented forest tract in Madison Parish. The tract, known as the Blue Cat tract, is owned by Deltec Farm and Timber, Inc.

Researchers weigh a bear at Tensas River NWR.

During June and July, eight different bears were captured. Of these, six had been previously collared. The captured bears were tranquilized, ear-tattooed, ear-tagged, and radio-collared. Weight and body measurements were taken, blood and tissue samples collected, and a premolar extracted from previously-uncaptured animals to determine age. The Blue Cat tract, which has the highest apparent density of bears in the Tensas River Basin, has also been the most heavily trapped. Some bears seem to recognize conventional snare sets, and avoid or dig up the areas. Experiments with alternate types of traps sets are ongoing. Monitoring was done daily, and when practical, attempts were made twice daily. For a three week period, movements in 6 to 12 hour blocks were recorded on selected bears with the aim of obtaining a 24-hour movement activity record. The animals are still being monitored by staff from the University of Tennessee.

One of the more interesting events of 1992 was the April capture of a large male bear on the Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge that wore aegats identifying it as a bear previously captured in the White River region of Arkansas in October of 1990. The bear had been relocated to the Seven Devils Wildlife Management Area near Monticello, Arkansas, over 100 miles north of the Tensas River NWR. The bear was radio-collared upon capture at Tensas River NWR and has been monitored since. He seems to like his new found home and has remained in the area.

Research in the Atchafalaya region in Louisiana is led by Dr. Richard Pace of the Louisiana Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Unit at Louisiana State University with the assistance of graduate students Philip Nyland and Robert Wagner. Trapping activities in the Atchafalaya region, beginning in September of 1991 and continuing until mid-December, resulted in the capture and radio-collaring of eight bears. Trapping resumed in the summer of 1992 and resulted in the capture of an additional 26 bears of which 19 were radio-collared. An additional bear was captured in northern Point Coupee Parish in a three square mile forested fragment surrounded by agricultural fields. Through September 1992, 366 bears were captured at locations that were accumulated between the 28 collared bears. Among these, one was hit and killed by an automobile, two have been killed by sportsmen, four have dropped their collars and another has disappeared because of a faulty collar or some other cause.

Mississippi State University staff have initiated bear trapping operations and have captured seven bears, two adult males and one adult female. The study, coordinated by Dr. Harry Jacobson, is taking place in western Coahoma County, Mississippi, near the Arkansas border. This is the beginning of a major study on bear use of forested habitats and the relationship between black bear ecology and forest management.

Cathy Shropshire, a PhD candidate at MSU, is conducting a series of...
Management Handbook Available to Landowners

The first edition of a "Black Bear Management Handbook" has been published by the BBCC and is available to landowners and land managers interested in black bear ecology and management of black bear.

The publication provides recommendations on management of different habitat types, from bottomland hardwood to upland pine. It discusses agricultural considerations, the positives and negatives associated with certain crops in bear habitat and the state and federal programs affecting habitat. It contains sections on resolution of human/bear conflicts and an introduction to the concept of landscape management, a coordinated approach in which various user groups work together to promote bear management over a large area. A long-range goal of the BBCC, the objectives of this approach in management of black bears include:

1. Preventing further habitat destruction,
2. Establishing corridors between existing fragmented habitats,
3. Integrating management across tracts to effectively use fragmented resources, and
4. Focusing efforts of a diverse user group toward common management objectives that benefit the bear.

With input from the membership of the BBCC the publication was edited by Everead Bakers and Pati Henson of the Mississippi Forestry Commission. Funding was provided by the American Forest Resource Alliance and American Forest Council and printing was done at cost by Devis and Associates of Ruston, Louisiana. Copies of the "Black Bear Management Handbook" are available for those interested in the future of the black bear in the region. Call or write the BBCC Chairman or Coordinator for more information.

BLACK BEAR RESEARCH

Continued from page 7

veys to assess public attitudes and tolerance for black bear in Mississippi. A landowner survey has also been maintained to quantify the public's opinion regarding black bear habitat. Surveys have been mailed to 1,200 Mississippi landowners, a timber company survey was done at cost by Devis and Associates of Ruston, Louisiana. Copies of the "Black Bear Management Handbook" are available for those interested in the future of the black bear in the region. Call or write the BBCC Chairman or Coordinator for more information.

The ongoing research on the Louisiana bear would not be possible if not for the support of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, the U.S. Forest Service, the USFS Southern Forest Experiment Station, Louisiana State University Agricultural Center, the cooperative funding by the Louisiania Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Unit, the University of Tennessee, Mississippi State University, Virginia Tech University, Anderson-Tulcy Co., Jame River Corp., Gulf States Utilities Co., and the National Council of the Paper Industry for Air and Stream Improvement, Inc.

Necessary and other wildlife professionals as well as industrial and private landowners, hunting clubs and farmers have made this work possible by providing assistance and cooperation and by allowing access to lands occupied by bears.

Procedure Needed for Handling Displaced Bears

Last spring, a bear cub taken illegally from a den near the Alabama/Mississippi state line was confiscated by enforcement agents from the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Because there is a procedure in place for handling displaced bears, the cub was cared for by various "sitters," and experienced close human contact for about three months before a permanent home was found. Named "Honeysuckle," the female cub went on to win over the hearts of everyone who met her. But with all the handling, Honeysuckle became too attached to humans which caused problems with reintroducing the cub back into the wild.

This experience brought to the attention of the BBCC and others involved in bear restoration efforts the need for a set of guidelines for dealing with displaced bears. As efforts continue to restore bear populations in the region, the possibility of wayward bears increases. Placing them back in the wild as efficiently, economically, and with the least amount of trauma to the animal is a goal of the Committee.

Scientists and researchers from throughout the country have been observing how to best facilitate the reintroduction of orphaned bear cubs. Much of this depends on the age of the cub. If a very small cub is found, it will need to be fed from a bottle to replace the milk it usually receives from its mother. A bear cub can easily become attached to the humans who feed it and while this warms the hearts of humans, it is not in the best interest of the bear. Once released back into the wild, a bear cub that is too accustomed to humans does not have a good chance of survival. It may encounter other humans and consider them as friendly as its earlier bear sitters. If they consider the bear a threat or a nuisance, they may try to kill it.

To help solve the problem of attachment to humans, some researchers have recommended "using a disguise" when feeding captive bears. With small cubs, it might be good to wear a puppet, so that the cub can not see or smell the human hand. If the bear is older and can be fed solid food, it should be placed in the enclosure without the animal seeing the person who delivers it.

After captive bears are healthy enough, researchers can locate the best possible places to reintroduce them. Black bears roam for miles, so a site that is far from human inhabits and provides the appropriate habitat is what researchers look for. If a site is small and needs a "foster" mother, researchers who monitor the bear populations in the region should know where to find the best candidate. A sow will not usually adopt a cub unless she is tricked into it. Sometimes a substance like Vick's VapoRub is placed over her nostrils so that she cannot smell the new cub's different scent. Researchers can also give the mother a mild drug, remove all of her cubs and replace them, together with their new siblings, a couple of hours. Black bears are usually self-sufficient enough to be released into the wild at about 6 months of age. If large enough, they should be radio-collared so that researchers can monitor how well they adapt after release.

In efforts to continue black bear populations in our area, the chances of bears finding their way into unnatural situations increase. These are, for example, orphaned cubs like Honeysuckle or perhaps animals that have been hit by cars or injured in some other way. While not normally threatening to man, the bears will encounter problems if they are not handled properly. For this reason, the BBCC is working to determine the best ways to deal with these animals. Locations need to be identified to properly house and care for them. These will likely be in the areas of occupied habitat. Each location would need to have adequate staff in place, including veterinarians, and have a good working relationship with state and federal law enforcement officers, biologists, and bear rehabilitation experts. These people will be able to provide food for the bear, medical attention if necessary, and handle placing them back into their natural habitat. Ideally, there should be regional rehabilitation centers. The Audubon Institute's Species Survival Center near New Orleans may be the ideal place to try to accommodate the needs of this region. However, until the details are worked out, arrangements need to be made with other zoos or suitable facilities.

Black bears that stumbe out of their habitat and into ours provide great hope for the future of the entire species. Researchers are allowed a closer look at them as they are cared for in captivity and returned to the wild. However, this must be handled properly to allow them to survive.

That is why the BBCC is hard at work establishing specific protocols on displaced bears. Successful black bear reintroductions will merit nothing but good results for bear and human alike.
Use of Managed Forests by Black Bears

by T. Brently Wiegley

Forest management can affect black bear movement and impact on their food supply, escape cover, bedding and denning sites, and human access. Forest management activities often require road building or the opening of roads previously closed. Many experts believe that access management is the single most important forest management activity affecting black bear. Access management does not mean a prohibition of road building, but their subsequent management, be it closure or regulated access. Open roads in bear habitat greatly increase human activities that may have a negative impact on bears. The relationship between road and human densities can be weakened by closing permanent roads or using gates to control access. Regulated, well managed roads and road sides will improve bear habitat, minimizing the chances of bears being hit by vehicles or harrassed by people. Forest management can also affect the capability of habitats to produce foods for bear. Although activities other than road are important to bears, food availability is crucial to bear growth and disturbance increases. In addition, road robbing from logging slash bears beetles, grubs, and other insects that are protein-rich food sources for bears.

A critical component of bear habitat is availability of denning sites, including cavity trees. Present and potential cavity trees should be identified and maintained regardless of other stand management practices. Of 20 radio-collared bears in the Tenness River Basin in Louisiana, 38 percent used brushpile or ground nests for winter dens and 68 percent utilized den trees. While den trees may not be necessary for successful denning and reproduction in certain southeastern wetlands, in areas subject to seasonal flooding where dens located on the ground become inundated, the availability of den trees enhances the quality of the habitat for bears. Where feasible, deadfall trees, logging slash and tops should be left for bedding and denning sites.

Prescribed fire is sometimes used in managed forests to control unwanted woody competitors to crop trees, reduce fuel loads, and to prepare sites for regeneration. Fire in the pine ecosystem is a natural occurrence. To enhance the quality of habitat for bear, burning in pine stands should be conducted on a 3 to 5 year rotation, depending on conditions. Dry sites and those planted on poor soils should be burned less frequently. Streamside Management Zones, forest corridors along streams and drainages, should always be protected from fire.

Management of forests can definitely affect the quality of the habitat for bears. One of the objectives of forest management is to maintain a productive, highly vigorous forest. From a bear habitat standpoint, a productive forest stimulates yield from hard mast-producing trees and maintains a diversity of foods. Rotation length for crop trees and thinning should be designed to improve species composition, remove individual trees of poor quality or vigor, promote regeneration of desirable timber species, encourage food production and create escape and nesting cover for bear and a variety of other wildlife species. While bears may initially avoid cutovers areas, their use of these areas increases as vegetation grows and as seed and fruit production increases. Timber harvest and prescribed burning are ways to increase diversity and quality of vegetation, leading to greater habitat diversity and more sources of food for bears.
LOUISIANA BLACK BEAR FACTS

• The Louisiana black bear (*Ursus americanus luteolus*) was once common throughout all of Louisiana, eastern Texas, southern Arkansas, and southern Mississippi. Presently, it is estimated that there are 200-300 bears remaining in Louisiana, 25 to 50 in Mississippi, and none in eastern Texas.

• The decline in Louisiana bear populations is attributed primarily to habitat destruction. Bottomland hardwood forests, the bears favored habitat, once covered 24 million acres of the Lower Mississippi Valley. Today less than 5 million acres remain. Human disturbances, illegal killing, and fragmentation of the remaining woodlands have contributed to the bear's decline.

• Louisiana black bear are black, some with a distinct white “blaze” on their chest. Adult males generally weigh from 300 to over 400 pounds and adult females range from 120 to over 275 pounds. Body length, nose to tail, ranges from 3 to 6 feet.

• Female black bear become sexually mature at 3 to 5 years of age and have cubs (1 to 5) every other year. As with most wildlife, the young are very vulnerable and juvenile mortality can be significant. The young remain with their mother the first year, den with her the following winter, and find their own territory in their second summer.

• Bear tend to range over large areas in search of basic needs such as food, escape cover, den sites, and mates. Males have been known to range up to 40,000 acres and females about half that area.

• Classified as carnivores, black bear are not active predators. They are opportunistic feeders and will eat almost anything that is available. Berries in summer and acorns in fall are central staples. Bear also feed on agricultural crops such as corn, wheat, oats, and love sugarcane in the fall when its sugar content is high.

• Black bear are very intelligent, shy and secretive animals, and generally work hard at avoiding contact with humans. Dangerous situations may occur whenever close human activity is perceived as threatening to cubs or otherwise aggressive. The best advice is for humans to avoid close contact with bears.

BLACK BEAR CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

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