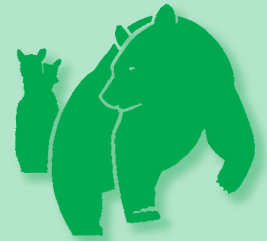


Black Bear Conservation Coalition NEWSLETTER



Volume 16, No. 1

July 2010

Black Bear Conservation Coalition Celebrates 20th Anniversary on May 14

Friends and supporters of the Black Bear Conservation Coalition gathered at the Hemingbough Cultural Arts Center in St. Francisville, LA, on May 14, to celebrate 20 years of collaborative efforts to recover the threatened Louisiana black bear. Almost 100 attendees traveled from Arkansas, Mississippi, Texas, and many parts of Louisiana to commemorate the success of the BBCC. Media personality and noted author Leo Honeycutt served as Master of Ceremonies for the event and was available to sign his most recent bestseller, a biography of former governor Edwin Edwards. Art donated by a number of artists including Hunt Slonem, Robert Bissell, Gloria Chadwick, Leslie Kirchner, and Baton Rouge resident Charles Fryling was available through a silent auction and several local artists brought their work and offered it for sale. Several golf packages and dining opportunities were also available for bidding. Opening comments by Mr. Honeycutt were followed by comments by BBCC Chairman Nathan Garner. Executive Director Paul Davidson then gave a presentation covering the history and activities of the



Meridith Smith, Patia LaCour, Dr. Jim LaCour (LDWF Veterinarian), Thomas Smith and Eric Templet enjoying the good company at the 20th Anniversary Celebration.



Art by New York artist Hunt Slonem for display and bidding in the silent auction.

BBCC. While several of the original cast of characters that formed the BBCC back in 1990 were present, most in attendance were either relatively new or brand new to the BBCC. Several companies, agencies and individuals were recognized for their support for wildlife and bear conservation in Louisiana, including Georgia-Pacific Port Hudson Operations, BP America, US Fish and Wildlife Service Southeast Refuge Complex and the US Fish and Wildlife Service Ecological Services Office in Lafayette. Mr. John W. Barton, Sr. was recognized for his many years of dedication to wildlife conservation in Louisiana, which has included his providing housing for graduate students doing work on the bear population estimate study in Pointe Coupee Parish. Most of the BBCC Board was in attendance, helping take care of the many details involved in such an event. A good time was had by all and plans are to host a similar event in 2011. Louisiana's bear population is growing, and the Feliciana Parishes will be home to increasing numbers of bears in the coming years.



Black Bear Conservation Coalition

The mission of the Black Bear Conservation Coalition (BBCC) is to restore the Louisiana black bear to its historic range through education, research, and management of habitat and populations. The BBCC will accomplish its mission through partnerships among stakeholders, credible science-driven management, cooperation, and a genuine commitment to bear restoration. The membership believes that a healthy bear population can be an asset to the community and bears can coexist with other land use objectives.

Since its founding in 1990, the BBCC has been reversing those factors that brought about the decline of the Louisiana black bear. The BBCC continues to actively solicit input from all parties that may be affected by a larger bear population and work with them to resolve potential conflicts. Without the support of the general public, and the landowner in particular, the Louisiana black bear will likely remain listed as threatened under the guidelines of the Endangered Species Act. By working together, BBCC members believe they can help restore a truly unique and magnificent component of our natural heritage.

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Executive Director's Report

By Paul Davidson

WOW!!!! Twenty years of work, done cooperatively, collaboratively, and inclusively, has paid major dividends. Without doubt, our efforts to restore the Louisiana black bear to viability have been successful. More work remains to be done, but we have come a long way.

Looking back, I realize that very few current BBCC members were involved in the process in the early years. After the early organizational gatherings involving a couple dozen individuals, the quarterly meetings of the BBCC regularly attracted 125 or more attendees, representing state and federal agencies, timber and agricultural interests, conservation organizations, the academic community, and others interested in what we were doing. Farmers, landowners, beekeepers, students, hunters, animal welfare interests, and whoever else that showed an interest was invited to participate.

Since there were no real bear "experts" in our region, Drs. Michael Pelton from the University of Tennessee and Michael Vaughan from Virginia Tech University attended our meetings to help bring the group up to speed with respect to bear biology and ecology, and helped identify the voids in our knowledge, which were many. They had a tremendous influence in directing our research efforts in the early years.

Another facet of the BBCC initiative was to develop educational materials for landowners and to formulate a restoration plan for the recovery of the Louisiana subspecies of black bear. Committees composed of agency and industry biologists, working with those that knew bear biology, came up with documents that described activities that would not only help restore the bear population, but would also work well for major stakeholders, primarily private landowners.

And there was a political side to our work. BBCC Chairman Jimmy Bullock, Board member Murray Lloyd, and I made regular visits to Washington, DC, to discuss the BBCC initiative with congressional members from Louisiana and Mississippi. Senator J. Bennett Johnston, Louisiana's senior senator at the time and Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, was instrumental in helping the BBCC develop a good working relationship with the US Department of the Interior. The BBCC was invited to testify before congressional committees on 3 different occasions to address issues related to the Endangered Species Act. The BBCC has always and continues to promote incentives as the key to resolving issues related to species in peril.

Habitat restoration efforts have been successful due largely to the conservation incentive programs administered by the US Dept. of Agriculture. US Fish and Wildlife Service programs have funded additional habitat restoration activities. Again, success has come because we have had partners working together to do good things "on the ground." If a landowner is interested in planting trees



on marginal farmland, we can see that it happens, either doing the work ourselves, or directing them to others who can. Working with state and federal agencies, other non-profit organizations, and the research community, we developed a system for prioritizing restoration efforts in areas that would be of most benefit to bears.

Living with bears has and will continue to present wildlife managers with challenges. Bears are extremely intelligent and adaptable. Except during a brief breeding season, a bear's primary

interest is thinking about ways to access the calories it needs to build fat reserves to get through the lean months of winter. That often brings them into close proximity to humans, raiding garbage cans, pet or livestock feeds, or even bird feeders (bird seed contains 20,000 calories/lb.). We have always realized that education is the key to avoiding conflicts with bears, and have worked with state and federal agencies to generate educational materials and tried our best to seek grants to help fund these efforts. Until recently, the BBCC was actively involved in nuisance bear abatement activities, training dogs to haze nuisance animals, purchasing traps, and answering calls from the public. The agencies have now taken over those responsibilities, but we continue to develop educational materials and work with communities to resolve existing or potential problems.

Funding the operating expenses for the BBCC has always been difficult. I never really have understood why it has been so difficult to find the monetary resources to continue work that has been so successful. We are not a part of a state or federal agency, and though we get some support from both levels of government, the majority of our funding has come and must continue to come from private sources. Some support comes from private foundations, some from private industry, and some from individuals who want to support a viable, local, conservation initiative.

There is not a better model of a successful coalition of partners than the Black Bear Conservation Coalition. My office is full of awards and recognitions for our work. Credible professional organizations like The Wildlife Society and Wildlife Management Institute have recognized our program as exceptional. Government agencies, other conservation organizations, and the corporate community have all recognized our outstanding success. You are all a part of this success. This story has not reached its final chapter and needs your continued support to have the happy ending that we all look forward to reaching. Please continue to support the BBCC with your membership and encourage others to do the same. When we reach our goal of complete recovery of the Louisiana black bear, we can all share the pride and credit for doing something that most folks thought could never be done, in a way that is a win-win scenario for everyone, most notably the Louisiana black bear.



Chairman's Remarks

By Nathan Garner, TPWD



Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the Black Bear conservation Coalition (BBCC) this year brings thoughts of how far Louisiana black bear restoration efforts have come since 1990. In the past twenty years we have seen significant increases in bear numbers in Louisiana, Mississippi and southern Arkansas along

with an increase in bear activity in the forests of east Texas. This has happened in large part because of the partnership between the federal government, state governments and the BBCC with it many partners working in collaboration on education, research and management of habitat and populations over the historic range of the Louisiana black bear subspecies. It is a time to take stock of the many accomplishments of the BBCC and our partners and remember all of the hard work and commitment it has taken to get us to where we are today. It is also a time to remember the people who have dedicated a large part of their careers and personal time to the mission of the BBCC. Over a twenty year span of time, many people have come and gone who worked with the BBCC and contributed greatly to the cause of Louisiana black bear recovery. We congratulate them and the many people who are still involved in assuring that the Louisiana black bear subspecies will have a permanent place on the landscape in some of the last remaining wild places in the region. I look forward to advancing the mission of the BBCC as its current Chairman and urge you to get involved if you can. There is still much work to do and I welcome your participation and support.



Chairman Nathan Garner, Master of Ceremonies Leo Honeycutt, and Executive Director Paul Davidson plan last minute details for the 20th Anniversary event.



Erik Sandvik (BP) hands keys to donated Ford F-250 to BBCC Chair Nathan Garner as Gordon Tate (BP) looks on.



5th Cenla Bear Banquet

The 5th annual Cenla Bear Banquet will be held on September 24, 2010 at the SAI Convention Center in Alexandria, LA. This event is the BBCC's largest fundraiser and is supported by many individuals and organizations in central Louisiana. It features an extensive live and silent auction, with artwork, weekend getaways, golf packages, hunting and fishing trips, and many other valuable items for eager bidders. A buffet style dinner will be served to attendees and it is a great opportunity to learn about bears, the BBCC, and get together with other supporters of the black bear recovery effort.



Bayou Teche Black Bear and Birding Festival



This year marked another successful Bayou Teche Black Bear and Birding Festival in Franklin, LA. Plans are already being made for the 2011 Festival. Sponsored by the BBCC since its inception, this year will mark a change in organization. A local committee is incorporating the festival and will operate the festival under their new non-profit organization. The BBCC will remain involved and on the new Board of Directors. This festival is unique in that it promotes educational activities related to bears, the Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge, and other nature related activities in St. Mary Parish. It offers canoe and kayak trips into the refuge and other waterways in the area, boat tours into the refuge, educational seminars, and birding trips led by some of the regions best birders. Dates for the 2011 festival are April 16, 17, and 18. This is a festival that continues to impress all that attend.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Activities

LOUISIANA (submitted by Debbie Fuller)

Critical Habitat

We published the final rule to designate critical habitat for the Louisiana black bear in the Federal register on March 10, 2009. The rule underwent peer review, and we conducted an economic analysis. We also requested written comments from the public on the proposed designation of critical habitat for the Louisiana black bear during two comment periods. We received a total of 27 comments. In total, approximately 1,195,821 acres (483,932 hectares) in Avoyelles, East Carroll, Catahoula, Concordia, Franklin, Iberia, Iberville, Madison, Pointe Coupee, Richland, St. Martin, St. Mary, Tensas, West Carroll, and West Feliciana Parishes, Louisiana, fall within the boundaries of the critical habitat designation. Copies of the final rule, economic analysis and maps are available from our web site at: http://www.fws.gov/Lafayette/la_black_bear_PCH.html.

5-Year Review

We announced our initiation of and solicited information for the 5-year review for the Louisiana black bear in the Federal Register on August 2, 2007. We anticipate having an internal draft of the 5-year review completed by mid-summer of 2010. A five-year review presents an opportunity to track the species' recovery progress and review the species' classification. It may benefit species by providing valuable information to guide future conservation efforts. Information gathered during a review can assist in making funding decisions, conducting interagency consultations, making permitting decisions, and determining whether to update recovery plans, and other actions under the Endangered Species Act.

Recovery Activities

We were once again fortunate to receive funding for Louisiana black bear recovery activities through the Service's recovery program that enabled us to con-



tinue our support of: (1) USDA-Wildlife Services bear conflict management activities in Louisiana; (2) BBCC outreach and recovery activities; (3) Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge activities in support of the repatriation project; and (4) ongoing LDWF black bear population studies conducted by the Dr. Joe Clark, USGS and the University of Tennessee. The Louisiana black bear is a regional and national Service spotlight species – watch for a forthcoming podcast on our recovery efforts at www.fws.gov sometime this year. Dr. Clark was selected, under the Science Support Partnership (SSP), to receive funding to develop a habitat assessment tool for the Louisiana black bear. The SSP is a collaborative program through which USGS scientists address priority research needs identified by the Service. This work is an extension of a Service-funded study by Jennifer Murrow and Dr. Clark completed in 2009 entitled “The Effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on Habi-



tat of the Louisiana Black Bear.” In addition to assessing habitat impacts the model developed for this study clearly depicted the isolated and fragmented character of bear habitat in coastal Louisiana. Potential corridors that might eventually link the coastal bear population with other subpopulations in the Atchafalaya River basin were also identified.

Restoration Activities

The Lafayette Office Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program emphasis this last year was long leaf pine restoration (several hundred acres of longleaf pine restoration projects). Nevertheless, we completed a 25 acre black bear habitat restoration project this year. We continue to work closely with the NRCS, the LDWF, and other partners to encourage and deliver USDA Farm conservation programs to private landowners. Service biologists are getting more active with WRP assistance, as the latest Farm Bill has improved the appraisal process and payment rates have increased. We plan to initiate an update of the Louisiana Black Bear Habitat Restoration Planning maps this coming year.

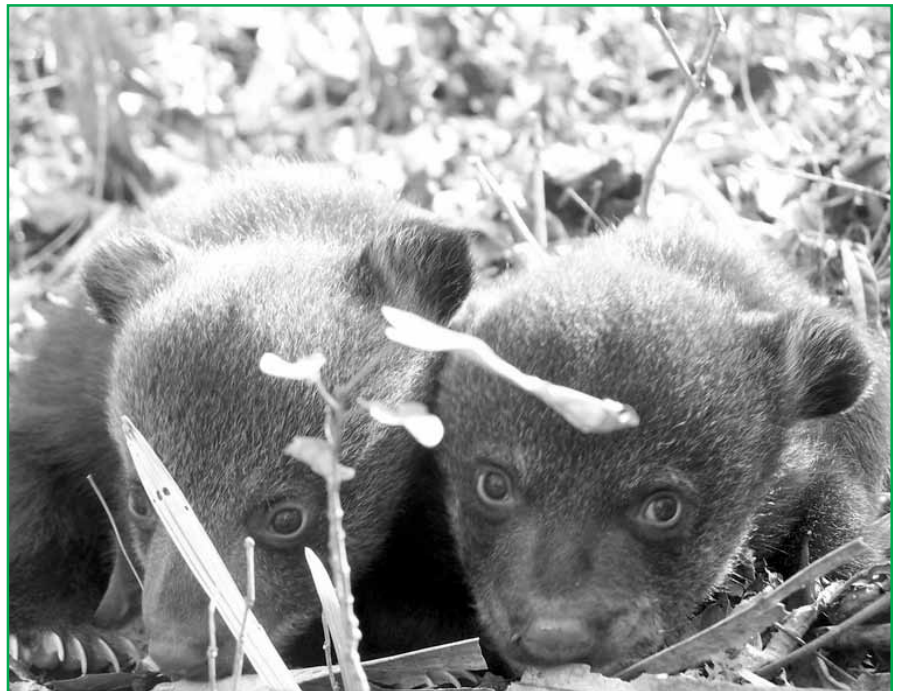
Refuge Activities

Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Project Leader Kelly Purkey, biologist John Dickson, and staff, and Lake Ophelia NWR Project Leader Brett Wehrle, biologist Bradley Bordelon and staff continue to provide vital support for the Louisiana black bear repatriation monitoring and population studies.

Once again, the Bayou Teche NWR folks (including Byron Fortier Paul Yakupzack) organized the educational area (Bear-y Patch) of the 2009 Bayou Teche Bear Festival – no small task. Paul and also gave boat tours of the refuge during the festival. There are plans to hire a Refuge Manager for Bayou Teche NWR this year.

Bob Strader, Project Leader for Bayou Cocodrie and St. Catherine’s Creek NWRs, and staff hosted their annual Wild

Things event on March 6. The event focuses on environmental education and is a fund raiser for the St. Catherine’s Creek Friends group. As usual, the Bear Obstacle Course was a big hit with over 300 children plus parents and family attending. In other news, Assistant Refuge Manager at St. Catherine’s Creek NWR, Chris Swanson, has accepted a position with the Service in Denver where he will be working in the Planning Division providing direction and helping set priorities for large scale land acquisition and easement programs associated with the Secretary’s “Treasured Landscape” initiative. Chris’ PhD work was on Greater Sage Grouse so he will likely be called on frequently to address concerns with the listing process and high profile impacts it will have on the oil and gas development in the western states. The St. Catherine Creek NWR Complex (50,000 acres) has been approved to get its first ever Biologist on staff who is anticipated to arrive sometime this summer or fall. The refuge has also been approved to add a 1-4 year term Visitor Services person who is expected be a tremendous asset to the refuge. That position is expected to be filled by late spring or early summer.





BBCC Tree Planting Efforts Continue

The BBCC continues to supplement the large federally funded conservation incentive programs with smaller projects, many that “fall through the cracks” with the other programs. This year, one hundred and eighty eight acres of hardwood seedlings were planted in Iberia, Madison, Catahoula, and Concordia Parishes. Most plantings were funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s Private Stewardship Program and one was planted on former sugarcane land as part of



a voluntary mitigation project on Weeks Island, a salt dome in Iberia Parish. Most were in areas already occupied by bears. An additional 124 acres were planted in east Texas as part of the BBCC’s Texas Hardwood Cooperative, using 54,000 hardwood seedlings donated by the Apache Foundation.



BP America Donates Trucks

BP America operations in Louisiana and Texas donated 2 trucks to the BBCC for bear projects in 2009. A truck was donated in Texas for research being conducted by Stephen F. Austin University in southeast TX. In Louisiana, BP provided a truck for the new Black Bear Conflict Officer in St. Mary Parish. These in-kind contributions are greatly appreciated, coming at a time when money is tight, but bear management needs are not diminishing.

Vehicles for Charity

The BBCC wants your clunkers, and you can get a tax deduction for helping clear out your garage or side yard. Call 1-866-628-2277 to donate your car, motorcycle, RV, ATV, boat or any other vehicle. We take care of the vehicle pickup, and all of the paperwork. It’s fast and it’s easy. Get rid of your old vehicle and help restore the bear. It’s a win-win proposition!

Call 1-866-628-2277 to donate your vehicle to the BBCC.



BBCC Board Member Educates Students About Louisiana's Wildlife

Chris Clayton, BBCC Board Member and Manager of Forestry and Wildlife Environmental Affairs for RoyOMartin, recently participated in an educational seminar for students at Tioga Elementary School. Clayton spoke to fourth graders, as well as the school's 4-H Club, on the threatened Louisiana black bear and various other wildlife species native to Louisiana. The students learned about the animal's habitat and the



wildlife management practices in place on RoyOMartin's timberland to protect and preserve the bear and other animal populations. Clayton engaged the students with various pictures and other hands-on materials. Students concluded the seminar with questions and were given time to explore and touch real Louisiana



black bear fur, casts of footprints, skull, and other bear related items. Clayton provided a unique educational opportunity for the next generation of wildlife lovers. (Word has it that all the students passed their exam on this particular unit. GREAT JOB, CHRIS!)

The Louisiana Black Bear in Cyberspace

In the past few months, the BBCC has been working to improve and expand our online presence. Please visit our website at www.bbcc.org to keep up with the latest bear news and information on BBCC events. You can join the BBCC, renew your membership and make a donation through our secure site. Need some bear gear? We've got that, too. T-shirts, hats, mugs, signs, and educational materials are available, as well as tickets to events, including the upcoming BBCC Bear Extravaganza in Alexandria on September 24.

We also have a Facebook page, and we welcome you and all your friends to become 'fans.' It's an easy way to keep in touch with us, and to hear news about the BBCC, the bear, and issues important to bear recovery. Check it our page on Facebook: Black Bear Conservation Coalition/ East Texas Black Bear Task Force.

Questions, comments, or suggestions? Please let us hear from you at info@bbcc.org.



BBCC Supporters

The BBCC is a broad-based coalition of private citizens and over 80 government agencies, universities, forest, agricultural and energy companies, and private organizations, including:

- Acadian Ambulance
- Alexandria Eye and Laser Center
- Alexandria Zoo
- Anderson-Tully Company
- Antoon Enterprises
- Apache Foundation
- Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
- Audubon Nature Institute
- Avery Island, Inc.
- Bank of Montgomery
- Baton Rouge Zoo
- Betty Wisdom Foundation
- BP America
- Brian Electric Company, LLC
- Bryant Crane Charitable Fund
- Capitol One Bank
- C-K Associates
- CLECO
- Cabot Corporation
- Cenla Web and Computing Services
- Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana
- Citibank
- Columbian Chemical
- Conservation Force
- Coypu Foundation
- Defenders of Wildlife
- Delta Council
- Delta Wildlife Foundation
- Deltic Timber
- Diamond B Construction
- EcoScience Resources Group
- Entergy
- Epps Plantation
- Foster Brown Operations
- Franklin Foundation Hospital
- Franklin City Council
- Georgia-Pacific Corporation
- Greater New Orleans Foundation
- Gustaf Westfeldt McIlhenny Family Foundation
- Henry Gas Storage
- Houston Zoo
- J.M. Burguiers, Co. Ltd
- Joe W. and Dorothy Dorsett Brown Foundation
- Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
- Louisiana Earth Day
- Louisiana Farm Bureau
- Louisiana Forestry Association
- Louisiana Office of Forestry
- Louisiana State University AgCenter
- LSU School of Renewable Natural Resources
- Louisiana Wetlands LLC
- Louisiana Wildlife Federation
- Madden Contracting Company, Inc.
- McIlhenny Company
- Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service
- Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks
- Mississippi Forestry Association
- Mississippi Forestry Commission
- Mississippi Museum of Natural Science
- Mississippi State University Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
- Mississippi Wildlife Federation
- Morton Salt Company
- National Audubon Society
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- Ohrstrom Foundation
- Paragon Casino
- Patterson State Bank
- Pennington Oil and Gas Interests
- Rapides Foundation
- Reliable Production Service
- RoyOMartin
- St. Mary Parish Council (Louisiana)
- Scotsman Mortgage
- Shockey and Associates
- Stephen F. Austin University College of Forestry and Agriculture
- Tara Wildlife Foundation
- Temple-Inland Corporation
- Texas A & M University, Kingsville
- Texas Department of Transportation
- Texas Forest Service
- Texas Forestry Association
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- The University of Tennessee Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries
- U.S.D.A. Farm Service Agency
- U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service
- U.S.D.A. Wildlife Services
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S.G.S. Southern Appalachian Field Branch
- Vanguard Charitable Endowment
- Vidalia Junior High School Wildlife Club
- Wildlife Technical Services, Inc.
- Williams, Inc.



Louisiana Report

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Bear Program doubled in size in 2009! Mike Hooker was hired as a Large Carnivore Program Biologist, expanding the program staff to two! We also saw the end of the Repatriation project with final analysis to be completed by University of Tennessee (UT) PhD candidate, Jared Laufenberg. Carrie Lowe finished her final field season in Pointe Coupee and is back in Knoxville analyzing data from the first 3 years of data collection. Two more UT graduate students have come on board to complete an additional 2 years in Pointe Coupee and a 3 year hair snare study on the coast. The planning for the Bear Aware project in St. Mary was finalized in 2009 and is off to a great start.



Maria W. Davidson is the Large Carnivore Program Manager for the Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries.

Research

Primary activities during early spring on Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge (TRNWR) involved assessing the reproductive status of radio-collared females, replacing radio collars nearing end of functionality, and relocating females from the TRNWR and Deltic area to the Red River Complex (RRC). We monitored 27 females to assess reproduction. On the TRNWR, 8 females were accompanied by cubs of the year (COY) and 2 females were accompanied by yearlings. Five females were accompanied by COY and no females were observed with yearlings on the Deltic area. Four females received new radio collars. During March, 5 females were captured at den sites, immobilized, and relocated along with 10 cubs to the Lake Ophelia National Wildlife Refuge (LONWR) portion of the RRC. Primary activities during the same time period on the RRC involved assessing the reproductive status of radio-collared females, replacing radio collars nearing end of functionality, and monitoring post-release movements of relocated females. Of the 25 females monitored for reproduction, 7 were accompanied by COY and 3 were accompanied by yearlings. Seven females received new radio collars.

During the summer month's activities on TRNWR and adjoining private lands involved monitoring radiocollared females to determine survival and reproductive status. Twenty-one females were monitored monthly to determine survival. Live trapping was conducted opportunistically on a limited basis to replace old radio collars. Construction of hair-trapping stations was completed on May 31 and sample collection began on June 8th and continued for 10 weeks. This sample period concluded the 4th year of hair snare data collection on TRNWR. On the RRC activities involved monitoring relocated females to determine post-release movements, survival and reproductive status. Twenty-eight females

were monitored monthly to determine survival and post-release movements.

During the fall, the activity on TRNWR and the RRC involved monitoring radiocollared females to determine survival. Of the 20 bears on TRNWR and 22 bears on RRC with radio collars at the beginning of this period, 16 and 19 bears, respectively, still had active collars as of 31 October. The cause of inactivity for all collars was determined to be degradation of break-away spacers.

Four hunter-related mortalities were documented between 31 October and 31 December, 2009. A radio-collared female and her cub were shot by a hunter on Red River WMA on Saturday, 28 November, 2009 during a managed deer hunt. That bear was moved from the Tensas River Basin population to Red River WMA in 2007 and had her first post-release litter born in 2009. A third bear was later found in a different area of Red River WMA and was determined to have been shot on 28 November during the same managed hunt. Based on information obtained from a PIT tag found in the bear, the identity was determined to be a cub moved with her mother from the Tensas River Basin population to Red River WMA in 2008. The fourth bear was found dead on Three Rivers



Louisiana Report continued

WMA with gunshot wounds to the head. That bear was a radio-collared female moved from the Tensas River Basin population to Three Rivers WMA in 2006 and had her first post-release litter born in 2009. Those cubs were last observed with the female on 22 July, 2009 and were assumed to be with her at the time of her death. Despite a search of the immediate area around the female's carcass, the fate of those cubs remains unknown.

The third year of hair snare data collection was performed during the summer months in Pointe Coupee parish. The first three years of data will be analyzed and reported during the summer of 2010.

Bear Safety in Mind

St. Mary Parish has a new Black Bear Conflict Officer. Catherine Siracusa "officially" started in the conflict officer capacity on January 4, 2010. Ms. Siracusa brings to the table four years of service with St. Mary Parish. She has a full understanding of Parish procedures as well as a trusted working relationship with the local business community and residents. Since starting in January with the Black Bear program she has met with Parish



Officials, LDWF and representatives from SWeeDee, the company contracted to service the parish with garbage collection, to discuss and set schedules to implement the task of issuing additional bear proof containers to the high risk conflict areas.

Before placing new cans, issues with existing bear proof cans must be resolved. Ms. Siracusa has launched a campaign

to collect data from the residents and the municipality with the highest number of calls with bear conflicts. She has met with Mayor Accardo from Patterson and has made a presentation to the Patterson City Council, receiving full support for her efforts from the Mayor and Council to conduct a door to door survey. This survey will identify the exact location of existing bear proof cans and help identify an accurate number and location for the placement of new bear proof cans. This survey will also allow Ms. Siracusa to network with these residents to implement a Bear Safety in Mind Community program. She has been interviewed by local TV, radio and newspapers regarding her efforts for the survey and program.

She was invited and provided a presentation to the American Business Women's Association and is working with the Franklin Black Bear and Birding Festival to help educate the public on the Bear Safety in Mind Community program. She has been in communications with the local school board and has met with school officials to work closely with each school to implement bear awareness programs.





Mississippi Report

By Brad Young, MDWF&P

As the black bear population continues to grow and expand in Mississippi, so do the responsibilities of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) Black Bear Program. Mississippi's bear population is conservatively estimated at around 120 animals, found primarily within counties along the Mississippi and Pascagoula River drainages. While the current population estimate remains low given the amount of available habitat, it is important to note that the estimate is triple what it was just eight years ago. Bear sightings in areas known to harbor bears are increasing yearly along with new sightings in areas where bears have not been seen before. As natural reproduction continues within our state's borders and populations continue to grow and expand in adjoining states, biologists with MDWFP fully expect this trend to continue.

MDWFP and researchers from Mississippi State University (MSU) are currently monitoring 19 radio-collared bears throughout Mississippi. Over the past summer, 4 new bears were captured and collared along the Mississippi River. The 4 males were fitted with GPS collars which will record a location every 5 hours over the life of the collar. Over time, the collars will provide a wealth of information about movements along the batture lands of the Mississippi Delta which will greatly enhance our knowledge of dispersal patterns from populations in adjoining states. The last of these males to be captured marked the 28th bear to be captured and collared within Mississippi's borders in the last six years. Of equal importance, are the recapture of 3 female bears in Issaquena County. The females, consisting of a mother and her two female offspring, are vital to both current and future research as we see how successive generations of bears recolonize available habitat in the Mississippi delta. GPS data downloaded from removed and dropped collars has already provided insight into bear habits and movements which were previously unknown. As more and more collars are deployed, our understanding of what the future holds for Mississippi's bear population will only become clearer.

Den checks in 2009 failed to document the birth of cubs to a radio-collared female in Mississippi for the first time since 2005. However, 2009 did produce documentation through sightings and photographs of at least four uncollared females with cubs-of-the-year in Bolivar and Claiborne

counties along the Mississippi River. Documentation of these uncollared females and cubs translate into exciting and challenging research opportunities for MDWFP and MSU. Additionally, a den check performed in March of this year did lead to the documentation of a newborn cub on Davis Island in Warren County. The mother of the newborn cub, a five year old female collared in the fall of 2008, was the first female captured and tagged in Mississippi that had not been translocated as part of repatriation efforts in Arkansas or Louisiana. The documented birth of this cub to a "native" Mississippi female bears marks yet another milestone for the MDWFP Black Bear Program.

Educational efforts in the Magnolia State continue to pay dividends as more and more people join the "Mississippi bear bandwagon". Over 40 presentations about bears in Mississippi were given by biologists with MDWFP ranging from one end of the state to the other. Popular articles written by biologists and private citizens for magazines and newspapers have also helped to educate the citizens and sportsmen of Mississippi about the black bear. The MDWFP Black Bear Program webpage also received a facelift over the past year. The new and improved site contains articles on ecology and management, video clips and news stories, and photo albums all dedicated to Mississippi bears. The website can be accessed at www.mdwfp.com/bear





Texas Report

By Nathan Garner, TPWD

Research

The research project titled the “Habitat Suitability and Occupancy of Three Northeast Texas River Systems for Black Bear” was initiated in 2007 by Dr. Chris Comer and graduate student Tim Siegmund of Stephen F. Austin State University (SFASU) with funding from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). All field seasons have been completed and all final results will be reported in the Master Thesis later in 2010. This joint research project will help determine occupancy and habitat suitability for black bears in a 23,500 km² focal area in northeast Texas. Preliminary results were reported in the June 2009 BBCC Newsletter. A companion study in the Pineywoods ecosystem of southeast Texas was initiated by Dr. Chris Comer and graduate student Dan Kaminski of SFASU in 2009 with funding provided by TPWD and the BBCC. Contiguous forested habitats greater than 25 km² using the latest in satellite imagery are being identified. Hair snare sampling is being conducted to determine bear occupancy and demographics in selected blocks of large forested habitat. Randomly located vegetation plots to determine habitat suitability using an accepted index model are also being established. Field work began in the summer of 2009 and will continue through 2011. The final results of this study will be used to prioritize areas and activities for further research, education, outreach and monitoring in southeast Texas. Two human dimension studies from East Texas both authored by Morzillo et. al. were recently published in the *Human Dimensions of Wildlife Journal* (14:407-418, 2009) and the *Journal of Environmental Management* (April 2010) and titled “Evaluating Hunter Support for Black Bear Restoration in East Texas” and “Socioeconomic Factors Affecting Local Support for Black Bear Recovery Strategies”, respectively.

Monitoring

TPWD documented 15 reliable black bear sightings from September 1, 2008 to August 31, 2009 in East Texas within or adjacent to the historic range of the Louisiana black bear. This represents the largest number of reliable bear sightings in East Texas ever reported over a 12 month period. One factor that has increased the level of documented reliable sightings is the willingness of private landowners and land managers to share bear photos with TPWD that were taken by their motion sensitive wildlife cameras placed on trails and at deer feeding stations. Efforts will continue in 2010

to aggressively pursue the documentation of valid bear sightings in East Texas with associated GIS reference points identified. It is believed that these documented bear sightings in East Texas primarily consist of sub-adult and adult males making excursions from the adjoining states of Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana where bear populations are naturally growing in number and expanding their occupied range.

Partnerships

The East Texas Black Bear Task Force (ETBBTF) is composed of over 30 organizations from the public, private and non-profit sectors and is structured as a working sub-committee of the BBCC. The primary focus of the ETBBTF is to carry out the mission of the BBCC in East Texas and to implement elements of the East Texas Black Bear Conservation and Management Plan (2005 – 2015). Three meetings have been held each year since 2006 to communicate and coordinate fundraising, educational outreach and research/management activities. The most recent meeting occurred on April 14, 2010 in Lufkin, Texas. Significant accomplishments in 2009 and so far in 2010 include the delivery of several bear educational programs to the public that include annual and well-attended “Bear Awareness Day” events at both the Houston and Lufkin Zoos; the continuation of the Hardwood Tree Planting Cooperative Project; the distribution of a Curriculum Guide on bears for school teachers; the expanded delivery of bear education signs for private landowners; the distribution of Media Kits on black bears to the various media outlets; and field assistance to SFASU researchers. Members of the ETBBTF worked together to conduct the first “Black Bears of East Texas Educator’s Workshop” held at the Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Center on February 27, 2010. Approximately 80 school teachers participated and received 3 hours of continuing education credits and a free East Texas Educator’s Guide to Black Bears. Similar teacher workshops are planned in the future. The ETBBTF also produced a new map showing the boundaries for northeast Texas bear recovery zones and a southeast Texas bear recovery zones based on the best habitat suitability and bear sightings information available. This will allow the ETBBTF to focus bear restoration efforts primarily within these bear recovery zones where bears are most likely to re-establish themselves naturally and survive long-term.



Understanding Bear Behavior is Best Way to Avoid Conflicts



The best way to avoid conflicts with bears is to understand their behavior and what motivates their actions. Most bear/human interaction involves the bears search for food, too often food supplied either intentionally or

unintentionally by humans. Unintentional, generally in the form of garbage, is no less serious than intentional, the results are the same. The bear is attracted to an area where close contact with humans is inevitable.

When we allow bears to access human foods, even garbage, we are training them to become nuisance bears. Once a bear accesses the high calories afforded in human foods, it is very difficult to change their behavior. Bears are the most intelligent non-human animal in North America, with an extraordinary capacity to learn. They have excellent long-term memory, especially when it comes to remembering where those calories can be found. Bears will

remember where they found food and will continue to explore an area long after the attracting food sources have been removed. Even if they do not find food, they will travel in areas that increase their chances of being hit by automobiles and traversing areas where they are perceived as dangerous.

Conflicts with deer hunters using corn to bait/feed deer are increasing and changes in bear behavior have been recognized. Similar to squirrels in backyard bird feeders, bears feeding at wildlife feeders get pretty bold after finding food consistently over a period of time. In the past, most hunters simply had to make their presence known, clap hands, or make any loud noise to cause a bear to run away. Now, agency biologists are getting more reports of bears that ignore such hazing, choosing to stand their ground and eat bait intended for other game. Agency managers now recommend hunters carry pepper spray designed to haze bears if they are concerned about bears getting aggressive.

For the past 20 years, the BBCC has promoted the recovery of the Louisiana black bear. The success of this effort is well documented, but now that bear numbers are increasing, we will continue to work with all those impacted by bears, working with them to resolve all conflicts, perceived or real.





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