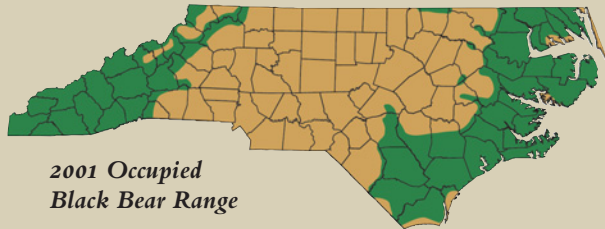


NORTH CAROLINA'S BLACK BEAR POPULATIONS AND OCCUPIED RANGE EXPANSION

Black bears thrived throughout all of North Carolina in pre-Colonial times. Nevertheless, like mountain lions and wolves, they were persecuted by early settlers and populations suffered from habitat changes. By the early 1900s, black bears were restricted to the most remote mountains and coastal swamps. Unlike cougar and wolf populations, which never recovered in North Carolina, black bear populations and range have expanded over the last 30 years. This expansion is due to changing human attitudes about bears, better laws and law enforcement, better management by wildlife agencies, the adaptable nature of bears and the ability of bears to coexist peacefully with people in most circumstances.

- 1971—About 4,000 bears lived on almost 2.5 million acres
- 2001—About 11,000 bears lived on almost 10 million acres



Wildlife Commission Bear Management Tools

- Regulations
- Bear Sanctuaries
- Law Enforcement
- Data Collection from Hunters
- Surveys
- Research Studies
- Habitat Management
- Educating the Public



For more information on black bear hunting in North Carolina, please visit our Web site at www.ncwildlife.org.
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 Cover photograph by Ken Taylor.

MANAGEMENT AND HARVEST OF BLACK BEARS IN NORTH CAROLINA, 2002



Mark Jones
Black Bear Biologist



NORTH CAROLINA WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMISSION
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

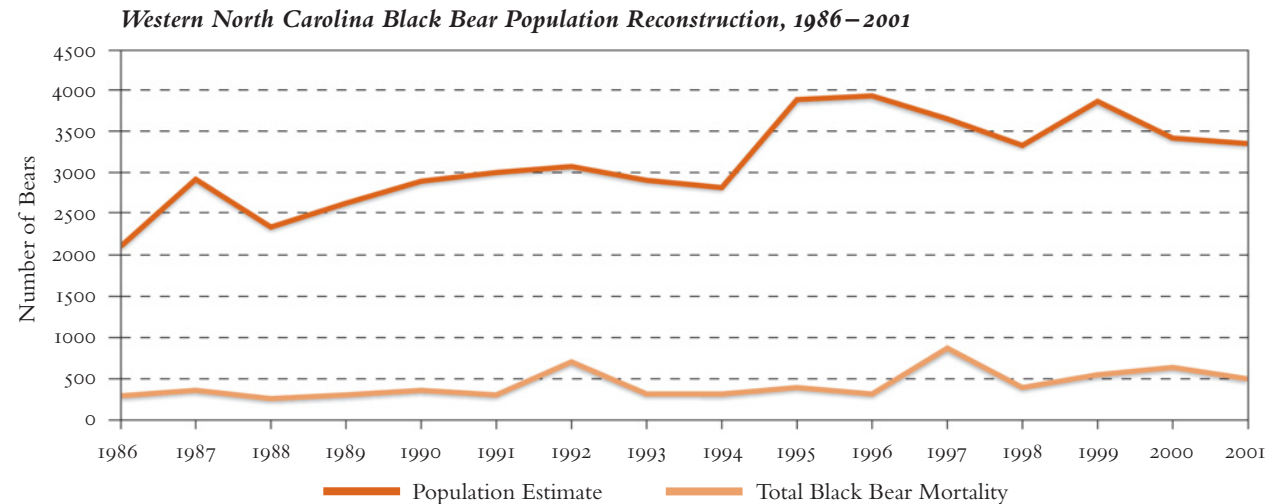
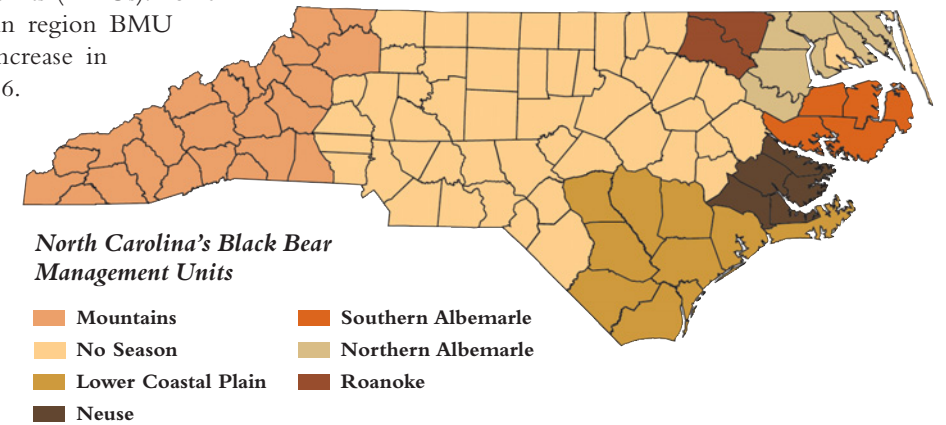
MONITORING AND ESTIMATING BLACK BEAR POPULATIONS

Wildlife Commission biologists and technicians spend thousands of hours each year collecting data from black bears killed by hunters and automobiles. Hunters are critical to this program because they provide more than 90 percent of our samples. In 2001, Wildlife Commission personnel collected 809 teeth and 153 reproductive tracts from black bears that died in the state. These biological samples allow us to monitor the population's age structure and reproductive parameters and to estimate population levels on areas called Bear Management Units (BMUs). For example, the Mountain region BMU has seen a steady increase in population since 1986.



MELISSA MCGAW

A Wildlife Commission biologist collects data that will be used to monitor black bear populations.



NORTH CAROLINA'S BLACK BEAR HUNTING HERITAGE

North Carolina has a strong black bear hunting heritage dating back to Colonial times. Early colonists relied on bears for food and hides to provide for their families. As early as the 1800s, North Carolinians developed strains of hounds used to pursue black bears; these hounds quickly became world-renowned. Beginning in the 1930s, hunters and conservationists pushed for bear hunting regulations and for the creation of a state agency to manage wildlife and enforce wildlife laws. The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission was created in 1947, and its personnel began officially monitoring black bears in the 1960s. In the 1970s, the Wildlife Commission began a sanctuary system that has proven to be very important for black bears. Sanctuaries allow populations to grow while providing hunting opportunities on surrounding areas. Currently, we have a system of more than 500,000 acres of designated black bear sanctuary with thousands of additional acres set aside as de facto sanctuary because landowners choose to limit or restrict hunting.

Mountain Black Bear Harvest

County	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	Totals
Alleghany	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Ashe	0	6	1	2	12	6	27
Avery	5	21	11	13	15	14	79
Buncombe	13	21	8	12	12	13	79
Burke	15	10	12	6	15	6	64
Caldwell	11	22	10	9	18	23	93
Cherokee	43	115	36	105	36	30	385
Clay	40	34	28	34	50	33	219
Graham	43	116	44	63	62	38	366
Haywood	28	66	18	44	32	37	225
Henderson	7	10	8	5	26	10	66
Jackson	15	13	13	9	24	12	86
Macon	24	49	65	31	47	78	294
Madison	7	48	38	33	36	26	188
McDowell	32	70	43	28	33	38	244
Mitchell	4	16	20	9	15	7	71
Polk	0	0	3	2	3	0	8
Rutherford	7	14	4	4	4	3	36
Swain	8	24	9	11	26	6	84
Transylvania	3	21	23	19	28	19	113
Watauga	2	5	3	3	3	4	20
Wilkes	1	1	5	4	4	4	19
Yancey	17	44	19	38	39	19	176
Totals	325	726	421	485	561	426	2944



KEN TAYLOR

Coastal Black Bear Harvest

County	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	Totals
Beaufort	57	94	82	81	90	155	559
Bertie	14	14	28	37	32	37	162
Bladen	49	41	36	53	49	52	280
Brunswick	16	21	10	20	25	22	114
Camden	55	22	21	31	37	43	209
Carteret	16	10	12	18	29	21	106
Chowan	13	3	2	14	5	5	42
Columbus	15	13	8	17	14	14	81
Craven	26	26	37	53	45	72	259
Cumberland	5	2	5	11	14	12	49
Currituck	23	6	3	10	12	17	71
Dare	1	2	3	4	4	2	16
Duplin	0	6	3	5	9	8	31
Gates	20	28	22	17	23	35	145
Halifax	ns	ns	2	8	3	5	18
Hertford	9	6	16	17	21	20	89
Hyde	117	136	189	145	157	149	893
Jones	42	80	85	73	65	115	460
Martin	10	5	7	10	18	22	72
New Hanover	1	0	0	2	2	1	6
Northampton	ns	ns	13	8	6	10	37
Onslow	12	26	24	25	45	49	181
Pamlico	27	18	47	18	29	42	181
Pasquotank	7	5	4	20	12	9	57
Pender	23	36	46	37	41	57	240
Sampson	4	5	2	5	2	3	21
Tyrrell	86	86	109	80	89	63	513
Washington	37	46	63	62	51	67	326
Totals	685	737	879	881	929	1107	5218

ns = no season

MONITORING BEAR QUALITY

Due to abundant agricultural crops and more stable food resources, the average weights of Coastal region bears exceed those of Mountain region bears. During the 2001–2002 black bear season, North Carolina produced 53 bears in excess of 500 pounds on the coast and eight bears in the 400- to 500-pound range in the mountains. The Coastal region continues to develop a reputation for trophy-quality bears. Similar to white-tailed deer, black bears must reach a certain age level to gain the trophy weights sought by many hunters. Commission biologists monitor and evaluate bear population age structure to assess the potential for a given area to continue producing quality bears. For example, the graph below depicts bear population age structure in the Neuse BMU since 1991.



MELISSA MCGAW

Wildlife Commission personnel capture black bears to learn about population characteristics in a given area.

Percent of Male Bears Harvested by Age Class in Beaufort, Craven, Jones, and Pamlico Counties, North Carolina, 1991–2001

