

Opinion: Hunts don't decrease bear-human interactions

By Toogee Sielsch

Just like Nevada, in the history of Florida no one has ever been killed by a wild black bear.

In Nevada history there have been 26 hunting fatalities over the years, and in Florida between 2000 and 2007 there were 441 hunting fatalities. Yet in both states the agencies tasked with wildlife management and wildlife conservation argued that a bear hunt would decrease the number of human/bear interactions thereby creating a safer environment for humans.

In Nevada prior to getting an OK for a bear hunt state commissioners argued in favor of a bear hunt stating that a hunt might reduce human/bear interactions.

"I'm doing this for the bears," said panel Vice Chairman Gerald Lent of Reno. "It is better to have them hunted than killed by cars. Gunshots scare bears. Maybe a hunt will take care of some of our problems."

But NDOW has said that they were wrong to say it would reduce human/bear interactions. They used that mindset first to promote the hunt then they later said, "It's unfortunate some people said that when it's not true."

In short, they used it to sell the hunt, then back pedaled when the hunt was approved.

Richard Corbett, former head of the Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission who approved the plan to hunt black bears in Florida, said of critics that, "Those people don't know what they are talking about. Most of those people have never been in the woods. They think we are talking about teddy

bears: 'Oh Lord, don't hurt my little teddy bear!' Well, bears are dangerous."

But despite Corbett's suggestion that killing black bears would make humans safer, a later statement from the FWC states that this is not the purpose of the bear hunt, and hunting is not an effective way to reduce human/bear conflicts.

Is it just me or does anyone else see a pattern of those that are in a position of power in wildlife agencies making ridiculous statements to win the approval of their desired goals not as entrusted caretakers of wildlife management, but rather the statements of blood thirsty trophy hunters?

And what are the unintended consequences of these hunts? Driving more bears out of the backwoods environment they inhabit and sending them running straight for the urban environments that border the wildland areas to seek safety from hunters, thereby actually increasing the number of possible human/bear interactions. It seems the majority of wildlife management agencies in this country love to cherry pick the science that backs up using hunting as a management tool even though that science has been disproved time and again over the last twenty years. Isn't it time to put highly trained wildlife biologists in charge of these agencies instead of most of them being run by blood thirsty trophy hunters?

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