

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Announces Strategy to Safeguard New Jersey Communities and Contain Wildlife

11/10/2022

Measures Include the Reinstatement of a Regulated Bear Hunt, Trash Management, and Deer Population Controls

TRENTON – To protect public safety and support a healthy wildlife population, Governor Phil Murphy announced that the New Jersey Fish and Game Council will discuss the approval of the State's Comprehensive Bear Management Policy (CBBMP) and consider amendments to the Game Code at its upcoming meeting on Tuesday, November 15. As a means of reducing the black bear population and dangerous bear-human interactions, the amendments include measures to reintroduce a regulated black bear hunt beginning in December. The Fish and Game Council will also consider additional limitations to a regulated hunt, including prohibitions on the taking of cubs.

"Since the outset of my Administration, I have promised to ground every difficult decision on the latest science and evidence in order to protect our communities," said **Governor Murphy**. "From the data we have analyzed to the stories we have heard from families across the state, it is clear that New Jersey's black bear population is growing significantly, and nonlethal bear management strategies alone are not enough to mitigate this trend. Every New Jerseyan deserves to live in communities in which their children, families, and property are protected from harm, and while I am committed to ending the bear hunt, the data demands that we act now to prevent tragic bear-human interactions. We must responsibly adapt to the population with carefully regulated and strict bear population management strategies to ensure our communities and families are protected from the growing black bear population."

"Black bears are part of New Jersey's natural heritage, and a sustainable population contributes to the health of our larger ecosystem," said **Commissioner of Environmental Protection Shawn M. LaTourette**. "Overpopulation and dispersal of bears to areas with less supportive natural habitat is a concern for public safety as well as the overall health and sustainability of the species. Given the black bear population and dispersion circumstances affecting New Jersey, a regulated hunt with humane limitations is necessary and appropriate."

"As chairman of the Fish and Game Council, I share Governor Murphy's concerns for protecting public safety while supporting a healthy black bear population in New Jersey," said **New Jersey Fish and Game Council Chair Frank Virgilio**. "Additionally, we have an obligation to conduct bear hunting in New Jersey both ethically and responsibly. The council's job is to consider credible black bear management as well as the non-hunting public and their acceptance of our regulations."

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) estimates that the black bear population in Morris, Passaic, Sussex, and Warren counties – where the state's population is centered – has increased, with estimates nearing 3,000 black bears. Meanwhile, reported black bear incidents, including dangerous human-bear interactions, have also increased. Incidents reported to the DEP from January through October of this year have increased by 237% compared to the same period in 2021. The most concerning of these incidents include: 62 aggressive encounters with humans, 1 human attack, 12 dog attacks, 12 home entries, 15 attempted home entries, 84 instances of property damage exceeding \$1,000, and 52 attacks on protected livestock.

The black bear population is projected to grow to more than 4,000 bears in the next two years. In the absence of population control measures, the rate of population growth will compound in future years as a greater number of female bears reproduce, with population reduction standing as the only scientifically sound method of restraining unchecked growth and dispersal.

Dense bear populations can potentially lead to inadequate natural sources of food for the animals and territory for young males. This causes wider dispersion of bears into areas where they can come into conflict with people and increases the risk of bears seeking sources of food such as trash, pet food left outside, seed from bird feeders, agricultural crops, and poultry and livestock.

The actions under consideration would reinstate a Bear Hunting Season for December 5 through December 10 for 2022 to run concurrently with the six-day firearm season for deer. If the 20% population harvest target is not reached, the season will be extended to the following week, December 14 through December 17. Bear hunting will be permitted on state and private lands within designated bear hunting zones.

There will be an opportunity for public comment on the CBBMP and amendments to the Game Code during the Fish and Game Council meeting on Tuesday. The meeting will begin at 10 a.m. at the New Jersey State Museum, 205 West State Street.

The hunt was suspended on state lands in 2018 to provide an opportunity to evaluate the feasibility of exclusively using non-lethal measures to maintain the population in a manner that is protective of the public's safety. With the expiration of the Comprehensive Black Bear Management Plan in 2021, no bear hunting has taken place on any lands in New Jersey since 2020.

During its November 15 meeting, after working closely with the DEP to develop mutually agreeable parameters, the Fish and Game Council will consider implementing strict prohibitions on the taking of cubs under 75 pounds, the taking of adults traveling in family packs with cubs below 75 pounds, and restrictions on the practice of baiting. Should the Fish and Game Council approve the filing, Commissioner LaTourette will sign the Comprehensive Black Bear Management Plan to evidence the DEP's concurrence with authorization of the hunt under the emergency proposal. The DEP will also launch a broader Wildlife Management and Public Safety Initiative, which – in addition to a more humane black bear hunt – will include a trash management pilot to advance non-lethal strategies, the expansion of local government planning for deer population control, and protections for exotic species.

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