

Louisiana Black Bear Critical Habitat



Adult male Louisiana black bear
St Mary Parish, Louisiana (USFWS)

Description

The Louisiana black bear is a subspecies of the American black bear, found in Louisiana, south Mississippi and east Texas. This bear is black in color and typically weighs 150-300 lbs as an adult.

Habitat

These bears typically require relatively large areas of bottomland and other hardwood forested habitat to meet their survival needs, including hardwood mast trees, fruiting plants and secluded locations for den sites to bear young.

Diet

The Louisiana black bear is omnivorous and typically feeds on a variety of food resources including nuts such as acorns, soft fruits such as blackberries and persimmon, herbaceous vegetation such as grasses and forbs, and animal matter such as ants and grubs, and supplemented by carrion or small animals.

Life history

Louisiana black bears are a large animal with a relatively long life span. They may live up to 20 years and generally reproduce every other year after 3-4 years of age. Female bears give birth to cubs during the winter while hibernating in a den. Louisiana black bears often spend their period of winter sleep in a den either in a very big hollow tree, or in a protected site on the ground.

Threats to survival

Habitat loss and fragmentation of forested habitat are the greatest threats to these animals which require large, relatively contiguous areas of habitat. Human related mortality has also been a threat for Louisiana black bear, as minimized and fragmented habitat exposes bears to increased risks of human caused mortality.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has designated critical habitat for the Louisiana black bear in Louisiana.

On March 10, 2009, the Service designated 1,195,821 acres of critical habitat 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.

Designating critical habitat is a function of the Endangered Species Act.

Critical habitat is a term used in the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that refers to specific geographic areas that are essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and that may require special management or protection. The Louisiana black bear was listed as a threatened species under the ESA in 1992.

Determining areas to designate as critical habitat.

The Service considered the physical and biological habitat features that are essential to the conservation of this species, including:

- Space for individual and population growth and for normal behavior;
- Cover or shelter;
- Food, water, air, light, minerals or other nutritional or physiological requirements;
- Sites for bearing and rearing offspring; and
- Habitats that are protected from disturbances or are representative of the historic geographical and ecological distribution of a species.

Bottomland and other hardwood forests that are inhabited by the breeding Louisiana black bear populations or provide corridors for movement between those populations are within the designated critical habitat boundaries.

Assessing the impact of designating critical habitat on private lands and private landowners.

The designation of critical habitat is applicable to federal activities that are funded, permitted, or carried out by a federal agency and require consultation with the Service. Critical habitat does not affect private landowners that are undertaking activities that do not require federal permits or approval.

Timber harvests will not be affected by critical habitat designation because the Service determined normal silviculture activities to be compatible with the bear's habitat needs and exempted those activities from "take" under the ESA when the bear was listed. Furthermore, existing agricultural activities will not be affected by the designation because agricultural lands are not considered "critical habitat."

The hunting of small game, upland birds, deer, and raccoons will not be affected by the critical habitat designation, nor will trapping, camping, or any of the many other activities that are not federally funded or regulated.



1 month-old cubs in winter den with mother
St Mary Parish, Louisiana
(USFWS)



Adult bear feeding in tree top
Louisiana
(USFWS)



Researcher handling bear cub removed temporarily
from female in den for scientific purposes
Concordia Parish, Louisiana
(USFWS)



Adult bears in tree top, Louisiana
(USFWS)

Critical habitat designation does not affect all activities that occur within the designated area.

An area designated as critical habitat is not necessarily a refuge or a sanctuary for the species. Activities that involve a federal permit, license or funding and that may affect critical habitat will require consultation. Most activities such as forest management, hunting, fishing and hiking will not involve a federal action and therefore will not trigger a consultation requirement.

To “Consult” is a required process of the Endangered Species Act.

Consultation is a process by which federal agencies use the Service’s expertise to evaluate the potential effects of a proposed action on ESA listed species and their critical habitats. Consultation may also identify alternatives to the proposed action to avoid adverse effects on listed species and their habitats.

Listed species outside of critical habitat areas are protected.

Listed species are already protected through the ESA’s prohibition against take whether or not they are in an area designated as critical habitat. Take may include harm to the habitat if the action actually kills or injures wildlife significantly impairing essential behavior patterns, including breeding, feeding, or sheltering.

Federal agencies must consult with the Service even where critical habitat has not been designated.

Even when and where there is no critical habitat designation, federal agencies must consult with the Service to ensure any action they carry out, fund or authorize is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species. Where critical habitat is designated, a consultation also ensures that the critical habitat is not destroyed or adversely modified.

Activities in forested wetlands that currently require U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permits for dredging and filling wetlands may be affected by the designation of critical habitat. There may be instances when additional measures to protect black bear habitat will be necessary.

Evaluation of impacts on economic development is a part of critical habitat designation.

Unlike ESA listing decisions, critical habitat designations require the Service to take into account the economic impact, as well as any other relevant impacts, of specifying any particular area as critical habitat. The vast majority of actions that require consultation with the Service proceed with little or no modification. Based on that analysis, the Service determined that economic impacts attributable to critical habitat designation (i.e., incremental impacts) are associated with oil and gas activities.

Critical habitat designations made for other listed species.

The Service has designated critical habitat for 540 of the 1318 U.S. species listed as threatened or endangered.

For more information, contact:

Deborah Fuller, Louisiana Field Office
646 Cajundome Boulevard
Lafayette, Louisiana 70506
337/291-3100