

Florida Black Bear 90-day Not Substantial Finding Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Who petitioned the Service?

A: On March 18, 2016, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) received a petition dated March 17, 2016, from Center for Biological Diversity, Animal Legal Defense Fund, Animal Hero Kids, Animal Rights Foundation of Florida, Animal Welfare Institute, Big Cat Rescue, Guillaume Chapron, CompassionWorks International, Environmental Action, The Humane Society of the United States, Jungle Friends Primate Sanctuary, Miha Krofel, The League of Women Voters of Florida, Lobby for Animals, Paul C. Paquet, Stuart Pimm, Preserve Our Wildlife, Sierra Club Florida Chapter, South Florida Wildlands Association, Speak Up Wekiva, Stop the Florida Bear Hunt, Adrian Treves, John A. Vucetich, and Robert Wielgus (hereinafter referred to as the petitioners) requesting that the Florida black bear be listed as threatened or endangered and for the designation of critical habitat for this species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Q: What did the Service conclude?

A: The Service reviewed the information provided by the petitioners and other information contained in our files at the time of the petition and reached a not substantial finding on the request to list the Florida black bear. As such, this finding concludes our work on the petition.

Q: Why was the petitioners' information supporting their claims and statements deemed not substantial?

A: The petitioners provided information they felt relevant to their request. However, on review Service biologists found the citations provided did not substantiate the petitioners' numerous claims and statements.

This review combined with information already in our files resulted in the Service finding that the petitioners did **not** submit substantial information that would lead a reasonable person to conclude the listing action requested warranted a more detailed formal review.

Q: What were the Florida black bear conservation concerns raised in the petition?

A:

- Under Service's Distinct Population Segment (DPS) policy - the petitioners claimed that the Florida black bear subpopulations were genetically isolated DPSs and asked for designation as such;
- Under ESA Factor A – habitat loss: the petitioners claimed that habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, and human encroachment or other impacts, including vehicle strikes, have resulted in increasingly vulnerable, isolated subpopulations of Florida black bears;
- Under ESA Factor B – overutilization for recreational purposes: the petitioners claimed that the 2015 Bear hunt and illegal hunting are negatively affecting Florida black bear populations;
- Under ESA Factor C – disease and predation: the petitioners claimed that the Florida black bear is vulnerable to infectious diseases, as well as, that the populations were vulnerable to predation, including female bears and cubs cannibalism from adult males;
- Under ESA Factor D – inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms: the petitioners

claimed that state and federal laws have changed in ways that undermine the long-time survival of the Florida black bear.

- Under ESA Factor E – other natural or human-made factors affecting its continued existence: the petitioners claimed that other factors such as Saw palmetto berry shortages; small population size and fragmentation; climate change related to warming trends; and forest fire mismanagement are all negatively impacting Florida black bear populations.

Q: What is the estimated Florida black bear population?

A: In 2016 the Florida Black Bear occupied approximately 45 percent of its historic range with an estimated population of more than 4,000 that is increasing, a significant improvement from an estimated 400 in 1998.

Q: The petitioner’s raised concerns regarding the recent 2015 hunting season authorized by the State of Florida. Isn’t that enough to warrant further federal review for possible listing?

A: No. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s (FWC) planned and authorized the hunt within the conservative goals and guidelines outlined in their Florida Black Bear Management Plan (BBMP). The hunting program included a sustainable harvest quota, as well as a provision to terminate all hunting when met. These targets were successfully implemented in the 2015 hunt. The plan also included provisions for a thorough review of all aspects of the hunt, which FWC is conducting.

Q: Is hunting allowed by other states where black bears occur?

A: Yes. 32 states have black bear management plans that include hunts as a tool for sustainably managing their black bear populations. In these states, black bear populations are stable or increasing in 31 states (including Florida).

Q: Where can I find more details on your 90-day, not substantial finding analysis?

A: The information is available online at our North Florida Ecological Services Office website at www.fws.gov/northflorida.