

Louisiana Black Bear Is Removed From Endangered and Threatened List

Interior Secretary Sally Jewell announced that, after 24 years of recovery work by an array of partners, the Louisiana black bear has been removed from the threatened and endangered species list.

Jewell made the announcement at Louisiana's Tensas River National Wildlife Refuge, which has a substantial population of Louisiana black bear and played a major role in the species' recovery. Bayou Teche Refuge, Bayou Cocodrie Refuge, Lake Ophelia Refuge and other refuges in Louisiana also were vital to the recovery.

The bear became part of American culture after a hunting trip to Mississippi in 1902, where President Theodore Roosevelt refused to shoot a bear that was trapped and tied to a tree by members of his hunting party. The episode was featured in a cartoon in *The Washington Post*, sparking the idea for a Brooklyn candy store owner to create the Teddy bear.

"President Theodore Roosevelt would have really enjoyed why we are gathered here today,"

Jewell said at a March announcement at Tensas River Refuge. "Working together across private and public lands with so many partners embodies the conservation ethic he stood for when he established the National Wildlife Refuge System as part of the solution to address troubling trends for the nation's wildlife. As I said last spring [2015] when the delisting proposal was announced, the Louisiana black bear is another success story for the Endangered Species Act."

The delisting follows a comprehensive scientific review by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of the bear's status. The Service released a post-delisting monitoring plan that will help ensure the bear's future remains secure.

The majority of Louisiana black bear habitat falls on private lands, where the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries worked with farmers to restore more than 485,000 acres of bottomland hardwood forests in priority areas for conservation. One key tool was the use of conservation easements in these targeted areas, through which USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service worked with farmers to restore habitat on difficult-to-farm lands.

When the Louisiana black bear was listed under the Endangered Species Act in 1992 – because of habitat loss, reduced quality of habitat and human-related mortality – the three known breeding subpopulations were confined to the bottomland hardwood forests of Louisiana in the Tensas and Upper and Lower Atchafalaya River basins. Today, those subpopulations have increased in numbers and have stabilized to increasing growth rates. Additional breeding subpopulations are forming in Louisiana and Mississippi, providing a healthy long-term outlook for the species.

In 1992, there were as few as 150 bears in Louisiana habitat. Today, the Service estimates that 500 to 750 bears live across the species' current range where successful recovery efforts are enabling breeding populations to expand.

CAPTION

The Louisiana black bear, listed under the Endangered Species Act in 1992, was removed from the list in March. (Photo by BeingMyself, Creative Commons)