

Brown bears cannot be shot over black bear bait on the Refuge

by Rob Barto

With bear baiting season just around the corner, I thought I'd take this opportunity to review the rules and regulations for baiting black bears on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.

First and foremost, harvesting brown bears over bait is prohibited on the Refuge. However, black bear baiting is allowed on the northern half of the Refuge, specifically that area west of the Swanson River Road to the Refuge boundary, and north of Swan Lake Road to the section line approximately 6 miles north, by State and Refuge permit only.

The free, non-transferable State and Refuge permits are issued to those who provide their current contact information, a 2014 Alaska hunting license, and the Alaska Department Fish and Game (ADF&G) sponsored bear bait clinic number. This number is given to those hunters who have successfully completed a bear baiting clinic sometime during their hunting career. There are two upcoming clinics offered on April 15 at the Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association on K-Beach Road, and on May 2 at the Soldotna Sports Center during the Kenai Peninsula Sports Rec and Trade show. For those folks who prefer computers, ADF&G also offers the class online at <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=huntered.bearbaitingsched>.

For the third year, Refuge permits will be issued on a lottery system. Individuals interested in black bear baiting on the Refuge will need to fill out a permit application at the Refuge Headquarters on Ski Hill Road. Hurry though - applications for the lottery will not be accepted after 4:30pm on April 11, 2014.

On April 12 at 10:00am, all applicants must return to our office for the lottery drawing. During the lottery, hunters will be able to choose from approximately 200 one-mile sections (cells) for their black bear baiting stand. Once a cell has been selected, it will be crossed-off so no other black bear bait stands will be allowed in their chosen cell. Individuals must be present during the drawing to receive a cell.

Any remaining unselected cells will be available on a first-come first-serve basis at Refuge Headquarters beginning Monday April 14, 2014. Finally, those

individuals with registered black bear bait stations and their additional permitted hunters will not be allowed to harvest brown bears in their assigned cell.

All black bear bait stations must be clearly marked with a warning sign on which the permittee's hunting license number, the hunting license number of those individuals authorized to hunt over that bait station, and State and Federal permit numbers. The signs should be placed within 25 feet of the bait station, and 6 to 10 feet off the ground. Some hunters choose to put more signs at the start of their trail in addition to required signs.

All black bear bait stations are prohibited within 1 mile of a residence, including your own home. Additional Federal regulations prohibit bear bait stations within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of roads or trails, and within 1 mile of campgrounds and dwellings on the Refuge. The Refuge will provide a map with those boundaries marked to each person receiving a black bear baiting permit. The Refuge also prohibits the use of nails, wire, screws or bolts, or the building of permanent bait stations and tree stands, as well as cutting of green trees for shooting lanes.

Additionally, all bait (including contaminated soil), litter and equipment must be removed at the close of baiting season which is June 30, 2014. Finally, the Refuge requires all baiters to submit a harvest report by July 15 whether they set up a bait station or not.

Many of you may wonder why ADF&G and the Refuge allow black bear baiting at all. There are several reasons that come quickly to mind. Baiting allows a hunter to observe bears prior to shooting which prevents accidentally harvesting sows with cubs as well as juvenile bears. Youth hunters at a bait station are given a relatively safe opportunity to observe bears and learn subtle identification differences between sows and boars. Lastly, bait stations allow for clean kill shots in an area relatively free of branches and trees.

Some common violations that we see on a yearly basis include failing to submit harvest reports on time, building permanent structures, cutting green trees for

a shooting lane, and failing to remove all baiting equipment at the end of the season.

Baiting can be an enjoyable experience when done right. However, as with most hunting activities, it only takes the actions of a few to ruin it for everybody. So please report all violations and help us by recording license plates numbers or descriptions of those you

see violating the law. When in doubt, contact either the Refuge at 262-7021 or Alaska Wildlife Troopers at 262-4573.

Rob Barto is a law enforcement officer and K9 handler at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Find more information about the Refuge at <http://kenai.fws.gov> or <http://www.facebook.com/kenainationalwildliferefuge>.