

**STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
WILDLIFE PROGRAM**

**FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION MEETING
April 13-14, 2012**

CONCISE EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

WAC 232-28-286 2013, 2014, and 2015 Spring black bear seasons and regulations.

A. Agency reason for adoption: This rule is intended to reduce tree damage by bears; disperse harvest geographically and reduce female harvest; and reduce nuisance and damage activity, while maintaining long-term sustainable populations.

B. Changes, if any, from the text of the proposed rule and reasons for difference:

- Change permit levels for the 49 Degrees North hunt and the Huckleberry hunt from 25 to 50. This change was made at the request of the Fish and Wildlife Commission to provide additional recreational opportunity, while attempting to address depredation on deer.
- For the Monroe hunt, delete Green Crow as a participating landowner and add Campbell Group. The reason is Campbell Group purchased Green Crow lands.

C. Agency responses to written and oral comments:

COMMENTS	AGENCY RESPONSE
I believe that spring black bear harvest should be increased using the permit system already in place. Due to the risk of hunters misidentifying species, baiting should be considered to help eliminate the killing of Grizzly bears and black bear sows with cubs. It is my opinion that baiting would allow a hunter to observe the animals before attempting a kill. Due to the thick underbrush in NE WA, hunters are often faced with the decision to make hasty shots without enough time to observe the animal.	Thank you for your comment. At this time, the Department is closely monitoring the black bear harvest in NW Washington and other areas, as the median age of female bears is below objective. Baiting is a very successful method of harvesting bear; however, it has been banned by initiative and the Commission has no authority to change it. The Department has launched an online black bear-grizzly bear identification test to help hunters avoid misidentification. The new online test will be published in the 2012 Hunting Rules Pamphlet.
Increasing the spring bear harvest in Region 1 would be a good move; we have a very BIG black bear problem here in NE Washington. I am a logger here and I saw 27 black bears from the road last year and most everyone else that works in the woods have the same encounters with the numbers of bears seen. Fifteen years ago it was a surprise to see one and every one would talk about seeing one when they did see one. So I am all for this; it would be great to see the numbers come down a little, but I doubt that adding to the season will be much of a help now that the numbers are extremely high.	The Department is not recommending an increase in spring bear harvest in northeastern Washington at this time. The median age of female bears is below objective; however, the number of bears harvested in the last two years has declined, and the Department is hopeful that there will be an observed response in the next couple years in the median age of harvest females. As such, the Department is recommended status quo seasons.

COMMENTS	AGENCY RESPONSE
Additional westside spring hunts is not a necessity at all unless done on state owned lands where bear populations are larger. Some of the current ones are set up to create opportunity, but do nothing at all for timber damage. Off unit poaching is out of hand.	Thank you for your comment. The Department is not recommending additional spring bear hunting in western Washington at this time. The Department is currently working with the Department of Natural Resources for a potential spring bear hunt on some of their lands. If that item moves forward, it would be under consideration by the Commission in June 2012.
Thank you for expanding permit numbers and extending the season in the northeast.	Thank you for your comment. The Department is not recommending additional spring bear hunting in northeastern Washington at this time. The median age of female bears is below objective; however, the number of bears harvested in the last two years has declined, and the Department is hopeful that there will be an observed response in the next couple years in the median age of harvest females. As such, the Department is recommended status quo seasons.
Leave the bear hunting as is.	The Department has revised the recommendation to status quo bear seasons.
Please consider a westside spring bear season that is general.	Thank you for your comment. Spring bear hunts are used as a management tool in western Washington to address tree damage by bears. The Department and participating landowners believe that limiting participation through a drawing process is appropriate given the objectives of the hunt.

WAC 232-28-288 2012-2014 Fall black bear hunting seasons and regulations.

A. Agency reason for adoption: This rule provides recreational harvest opportunities for black bear, while maintaining long-term sustainable populations.

B. Changes, if any, from the text of the proposed rule and reasons for difference:

- For the South Cascades Black Bear Management Unit, change opening day to Aug. 15 for 2012, 2013, and 2014. Though population status indicators suggest the need for a slight reduction in bear harvest, bear harvest declined following season reductions in 2009-2011, and it may take a couple more years for the population indicators to reflect the population response to those reductions. Therefore, the agency is reinstating status quo seasons for this unit. Additionally, Aug. 15 was chosen to simplify the season dates by using a constant date rather than a calendar date change every year.
- Change the opening day in the Okanogan and Northeastern B Black Bear Management Units from Aug 18, 2012, Aug 17, 2013, and Aug 16, 2014 to Aug 15, 2012, Aug 15, 2013, and Aug 15, 2014. The reason for the change is to simplify the season closure dates to a constant date rather than a calendar date change every year. There is no biological impact.
- For the Northeastern A black bear management unit, change opening day to Sept. 1 for 2012-2014 seasons. This changes bear season in the unit back to status quo. The reason for this change is the population status indicators suggest the need for a slight reduction in bear harvest; however, bear harvest declined following season reductions in 2009-2011, and it may take a couple more years for the population indicators to reflect the population response to those reductions.

C. Agency responses to written and oral comments:

COMMENTS	AGENCY RESPONSE
<p>What exactly is the reason for taking an entire month off our season down here? How many landowner damage permits are being issued down here? I want to see the SCIENTIFIC reason for eliminating such a huge chunk of a season that has been there for years.</p>	<p>The Department has revised the recommendation to status quo fall bear seasons in the South Cascades. The median age of female bears is below objective; however, the number of bears harvested in the last two years has declined, and the Department is hopeful that there will be an observed response in the next couple years in the median age of harvest females.</p>
<p>Oppose the change in the fall black bear season start date from August 14 to September 1. I believe the start date should go back to August 1, like it had been for so many years prior.</p>	<p>The Department has revised the recommendation to status quo fall bear seasons in the South Cascades. The median age of female bears is below objective; however, the number of bears harvested in the last two years has declined, and the Department is hopeful that there will be an observed response in the next couple years in the median age of harvest females.</p>
<p>In reviewing the proposed hunting changes I was quite disappointed to see the NE bear hunting regulations change to the Tuesday after labor day. It is clearly crafted to eliminate the ability for someone to hunt through that weekend. Please reconsider allowing bear hunting over the labor day weekend.</p>	<p>The Department has revised the recommendation to status quo fall bear seasons in the Northeastern Washington. The median age of female bears is below objective; however, the number of bears harvested in the last two years has declined, and the Department is hopeful that there will be an observed response in the next couple years in the median age of harvest females.</p>
<p>There are plenty of bear in NE Washington. I would prefer the fall bear season remains unchanged in NE Washington beginning on Sept 1, or make it earlier like the Okanogan opening on Aug 15.</p>	<p>The Department has revised the recommendation to status quo fall bear seasons in the Northeastern Washington. The median age of female bears is below objective; however, the number of bears harvested in the last two years has declined, and the Department is hopeful that there will be an observed response in the next couple years in the median age of harvest females.</p>
<p>Leave the bear hunting as is.</p>	<p>The Department has revised the recommendation to status quo bear seasons.</p>
<p>Much of the East and North portions of the Okanogan Black Bear Management Unit are similar in population, habitat, and remoteness to the North Cascades and East Cascades management units. I recommend extending the later units so that the eastern boundary becomes Highway 97A North to the Methow River in Pateros; N up the Methow River to the Chewuch River confluence; continuing N up the Chewuch River to the Pasayton Wilderness boundary; then E and N along the eastern border of the Pasayton Wilderness to the Canadian border. This would increase hunting opportunities by about 15 days. Opening the season on Aug 1st when the bears are more diurnal in locations where populations appear very healthy, resilient, infrequently harassed.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comments. Black bear population indicators are within acceptable levels in the Okanogan bear unit. As such, the Department is recommending status quo.</p>

COMMENTS	AGENCY RESPONSE
Need to increase bear harvest in northeastern Washington. Bear population is expanding.	Thank you for your comment. The median age of harvested female bears in northeastern Washington has a declining trend over the past several years, suggesting that harvest is impacting the population. Until more information is available on the status of the living bear population, the Department is recommending status quo hunting seasons in northeastern Washington.