

Increase in Human-Bear Conflicts Inevitable with Question 1 Passage

On Nov. 4, Maine citizens will vote on Question 1, which seeks to ban hunting bears with the use of bait, dogs and traps. Maine is the fifth state to face such initiatives in recent years, with other states seeing increases in human-bear conflicts; a fact that anti-hunters conveniently leave out.

Similar bear-hunting referendums have passed in Colorado, Washington, Massachusetts, Oregon and California in the past 20 years. Four of the five states banned the use of hounds and bait, and all have seen an increase in bear populations – providing Maine with ample evidence as to why these techniques are vital to scientifically managing the state’s 30,000 bears.

All four states have seen an increase in either bear populations, nuisance complaints or bears killed due to nuisance complaints.

“The facts are there for everyone to see, yet the antis are ignoring them,” said Nick Pinizzotto, U.S. Sportsmen’s Alliance president and CEO. “We have to learn from these other states that taking away vital population-control methods will result in exactly what we don’t want: more human-bear conflicts.”



In 2011 alone, Massachusetts received 156 bear complaints, compared to only 77.4 complaints in the 1990s. This can likely be attributed to the fact that the black bear population rose by approximately 1,000 bears from 2005 to 2011.

In an interview with the Portland Press Herald in August, Wayne MacCallum, director of Massachusetts’s Department of Fish and Game’s Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, stated that there are constant complaints about bear encounters in the state. He went on to say that this is the largest bear population in the state in at least 200 years. He suspects that if a significant number of bears aren’t harvested, the population will continue to increase.

Colorado is facing the same issues. According to Jerry Apker, a carnivore biologist interviewed by the Post Independent in September, wildlife managers have relied on old studies that estimate Colorado is home to 10,000-12,000 bears. However, recent studies indicate that the number is, in fact, double that. Colorado’s own Division of Wildlife website warns visitors that human-bear conflicts are increasing in frequency and severity. On average, more than 350 bears are killed each year in response to conflicts in Colorado – a burden to state agencies financially and in terms of public employees’ time; the bottom line being increased costs to taxpayers.

Just recently in Steamboat Springs, Colo., four home invasions by bears in one night were reported, according to an article from the Craig Daily Press.

These states are not alone, as California recently made headlines after a woman was attacked by a 300-pound black bear that resulted in a broken rib and lacerations. And we cannot forget the recent attack in New Jersey, which resulted in one student's death after a black bear attacked him and his group while hiking in the Apshawa Preserve.

Prior to the referendums passing in Colorado, Washington, Massachusetts and Oregon, the use of bait and hounds were responsible for approximately 45 percent of the harvest. Compare that to the 93 percent that the use of bait, hounds and trapping accounts for in Maine. These states, which have seen an increase in human-bear conflicts, have much smaller bear populations and, in some cases, much more habitat than that available in Maine.

The average annual bear harvest for those four states hovers around 1,750 animals. To meet wildlife management goals, each of these four states needs to harvest only a fraction of what Maine biologists recommend for a healthy, sustainable and manageable bear population. Wildlife biologists estimate that 3,500-4,500 bears need to be harvested in Maine to keep the current bear population in check.

"The numbers and facts are there," said Pinizzotto. "The use of bait, traps and dogs is vital to maintain black bear populations in Maine. Wildlife management needs to be left in the hands of Maine's scientific wildlife managers, not a radical group from Washington D.C."