

Wisconsin's northwoods: home of black bear, hunting, and ancient traditions

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The black bear is viewed as a symbol of Wisconsin's wildness. Seeing a black bear in the wild is an exciting experience for many and continues to bring a thrill for each person who seeks the highly prized black bear as a big game trophy.

The American black bear (*Ursus americanus*) is a medium-sized bear weighing in at an average adult size of 240 pounds, native to North America. It is the continent's smallest and most widely distributed bear species. American black bears are highly territorial and often mark trees using their teeth and claws as a form of communication with other bears, a behavior which is common to many species of bears. The American black bear is the smallest of the three bears species found in North America.

Black bears have short, non-retractable claws that give them an excellent tree-climbing ability. Black bear fur is usually a uniform color except for a brown muzzle and light markings that sometimes appear on their chests. Eastern populations are usually black in color while western populations often show brown, cinnamon, and blond coloration in addition to black. American black bears are omnivorous: consuming plants, fruits, nuts, insects, honey, salmon, small mammals and carrion. Black bears will also occasionally kill young deer or moose calves.

Black bears are extremely adaptable and show a great variation in habitat types, though they are primarily found in forested areas with thick ground vegetation and an abundance of fruits, nuts, and vegetation. Black bears tend to be solitary animals,

although with, the exception of mothers and cubs. The bears usually forage alone, but will tolerate each other and forage in groups if there is an abundance of food in one area.

The Woodland Indians especially the Wisconsin's Ojibwe (Chippewa) people; indigenous to Wisconsin's north woods, have for thousands of years included the black bear, as a part of daily life. The black bear is highly regarded as one of the seven clans and called "Makwa" in the Ojibwe language. The black bear remains an important part of tradition for ceremonial and religious purposes and has strong ties to the Anishinabe' (original man) mythology.

The mother bear is

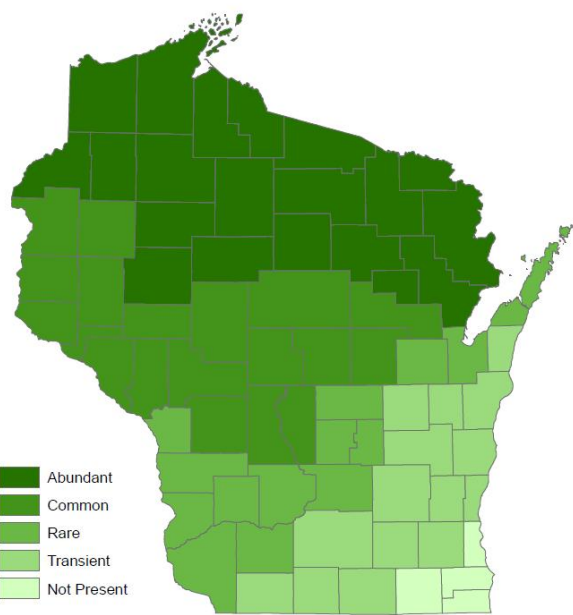
based upon studies by the Wisconsin DNR. In 2010, a total of 8,910 harvest permits were available. More than 109,000 hunters applied for 11,520 permits in 2016, making the wait to receive a harvest permit approximately 1 to 9 years, depending on the bear management zone. However, when one finally receives a permit, the opportunity to harvest a bear is better than 40 percent for most zones and some of the biggest bears in the country are taken in Wisconsin. Several bears registered by hunters each year top 600 or 700 pounds. According to the DNR website, Wisconsin is currently home to a thriving black bear population estimated at more than 28,000 bears.

Wildlife biologists in Wisconsin conducted research that provided better information about bear numbers in the state, which helps develop guidelines that will ensure a prosperous future for the species. This research was highly dependent on the help of volunteers, who placed thousands of baits throughout the north each year. The bait was laced with a dye that settled in a bear's bones once eaten. If a bear that had eaten the bait

was harvested during the hunting season, a small piece of rib bone was extracted and examined for the dye. This "marked/recapture" study utilized each marked bear to determine an estimate of just how many were living in the wilds of our state.

Bears mate during the summer and gestation approximately 63-70 days. The litter size is generally one to six cubs and two cubs are most common. Cubs remain with the mother for a year and a half or more, even though they are weaned at

Black Bear Density



known to protect her cubs with ferocity. She is also cunning and knowledgeable about the plants of the forest. Like the mother bear, the Ojibwe Bear Clan is responsible for protecting its people and members of the Bear Clan live on the outside of the village to ensure the safety of the gentler clans residing inside the village. The bear clan are also the medicine people; for they know the healing ways of the plants available to them.

The Wisconsin black bear population is thriving and expanding its occupied range in the state,



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