

Black Bear Damage and Nuisance Complaints 2015

By Pam Engstrom, Bob Willging and David Ruid

Abstract

The United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services (WS) personnel received 832 bear complaints during calendar year 2015 and trapped and translocated 519 bears. Three hundred sixty-five bears were trapped from agriculture complaints, 107 from nuisance complaints and 47 from property damage complaints. The majority of complaints (n = 542 65%) were resolved over the phone with advice and recommendations from nuisance wildlife specialists located at the Rhinelander and Waupun District Offices. Complaints requiring field investigation or trapping (n = 290, 35%) were dispatched to WS field personnel. Bears captured were translocated to large blocks of contiguous public forestlands.

Methods

Wildlife Services co-manages bear damage/nuisance abatement work with the WDNR. Wildlife Services entered into a cooperative agreement with the WDNR in 1990. The WS program is administered from a State Office in Sun Prairie and District Offices in Rhinelander and Waupun. The Rhinelander District Office is supervised by Bob Willging and the Waupun District Office by Charles Lovell. The Rhinelander Office covers roughly the northern half of the state and the Waupun Office the southern half. Wildlife Specialists are located throughout both Districts.

Nuisance bears are characterized as bears causing problems at bird feeders, garbage cans, dumpsters, campgrounds or similar situations that generally involve food or scent attractants. Agriculture and property damage bears are defined as bears causing depredations to agricultural crops, beehives, livestock, or property (e.g. house siding). Bear complaints received by WS District Offices on the toll-free lines are screened to determine the type and severity of the complaint. Most nuisance complaints are resolved by providing information on bear biology, food removal, e.g., bird seed, and other ways to reduce nuisance bear behavior. Chronic nuisance complaints not involving a food attractant are dispatched to field staff. After investigating the complaint, field staff may set a culvert trap in an attempt to trap and translocate the bear if appropriate. The emphasis of the nuisance bear program is public education. Trapping/translocation is used more routinely to resolve agricultural and property damage complaints.

Bears that exhibit bold or aggressive behavior towards people, are highly habituated to people, depredate livestock, or routinely cross electric fences and destroy apiaries may be euthanized by WDNR or WS agents. WS may recommend that agriculture damage shooting permits be issued by WDNR to producers to alleviate excessive bear damage to crops. WDNR is responsible for issuing agriculture and nuisance bear shooting permits.

Results

Calendar year 2015 marked the twenty-sixth year that WS has assisted WDNR with bear damage/nuisance abatement. Bear complaints in 2015 (832) were down 42% from the record number of complaints (1,439) received in 1995. The majority of complaints in 2015 were

nuisance complaints (70%), followed by agriculture damage (20%) and property damage (10%) (Figure 1).

WS personnel live-trapped and translocated 519 bears during 2015 (Table 1). Seventy percent of the bears trapped and translocated were involved in agriculture damage, although agriculture complaints accounted for only 20% of the total complaints.

A total of 107 bears were trapped and translocated from nuisance complaints, and 47 from property damage complaints. Bear traps were set at 20% of nuisance complaints, while 80% were handled with advice and recommendations. The toll-free phone system for reporting bear complaints again proved invaluable as most nuisance complaints came in on the toll-free lines.

During 2015, WS or the WDNR euthanized seven bears. These bears either depredated livestock, were highly habituated to humans, or entered occupied dwellings.

One nuisance bear shooting permit and thirty agricultural damage bear shooting permits were issued in fourteen different counties during the spring, summer, and fall of 2015. One hundred sixty-eight kill tags were issued to these permit holders, tag numbers ranged from 1 to 13 for each permit holder. Sixty-five bear were killed under the agriculture damage shooting permits. No bear were killed on the nuisance permit in 2015. In 2014, twenty-five agriculture damage bear shooting permits were issued with at least forty-seven bear being killed. Four nuisance bear shooting permits were issued in 2014 with one bear being killed under those permits

The cooperative service agreement between the WDNR and WS for bear nuisance and damage management continues to work extremely well.

Table 1. *Number of black bears trapped and translocated by county and type, 2015.*

COUNTY	AGRICULTURE	NUISANCE	PROPERTY	TOTAL
Ashland	24	12	0	36
Barron	6	5	0	11
Bayfield	17	0	2	19
Burnett	19	10	0	29
Chippewa	0	2	0	2
Douglas	10	3	10	23
Eau Claire	0	1	0	1
Florence	1	5	0	6
Forest	14	0	0	14
Iron	16	5	0	21
Langlade	23	1	0	24
Lincoln	6	0	0	6
Marinette	20	8	1	29
Oneida	0	2	5	7
Polk	21	2	1	24
Portage	1	0	0	1
Price	25	4	7	36
Rusk	49	6	0	55
Sawyer	65	23	17	105
Vilas	0	1	1	2
Washburn	47	17	2	66
Wood	0	0	1	1
Totals	365	107	47	519

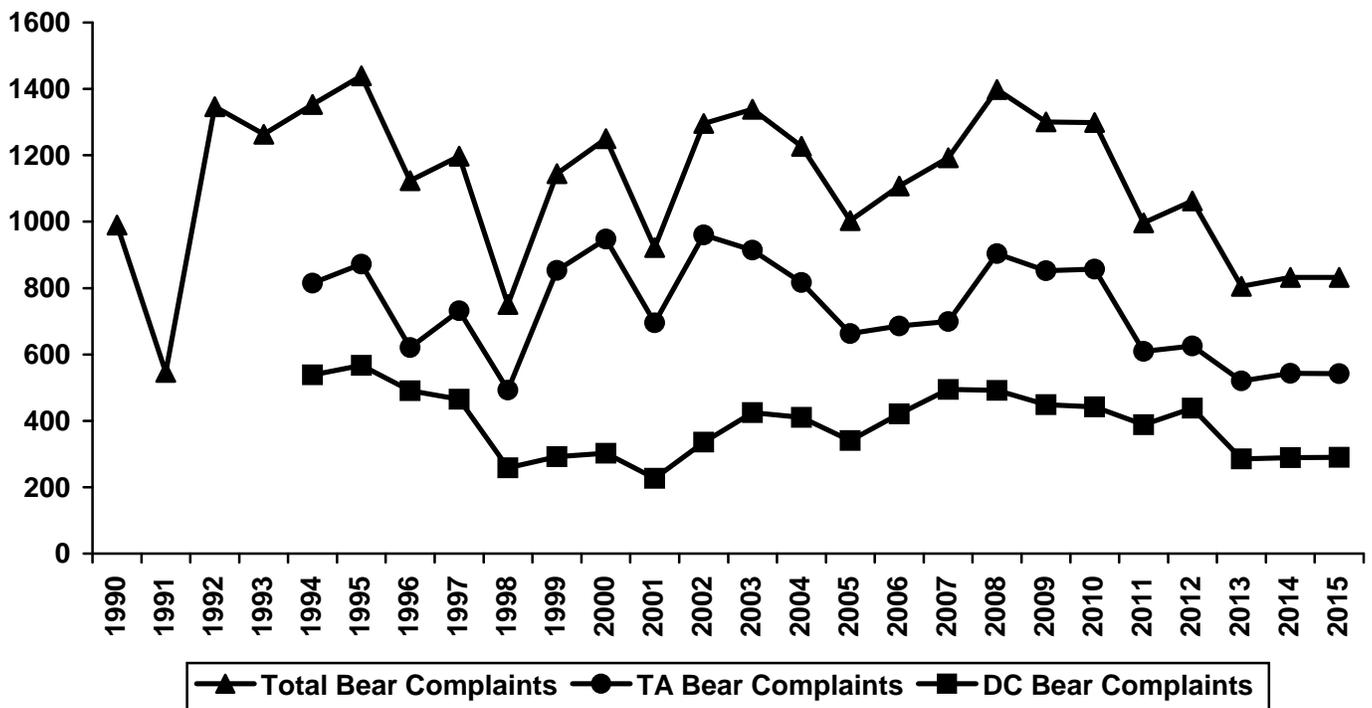


Figure 1. Total black bear complaints, black bear complaints handled with technical assistance (TA) and black bear complaints requiring direct control (DC), 1990-2015.

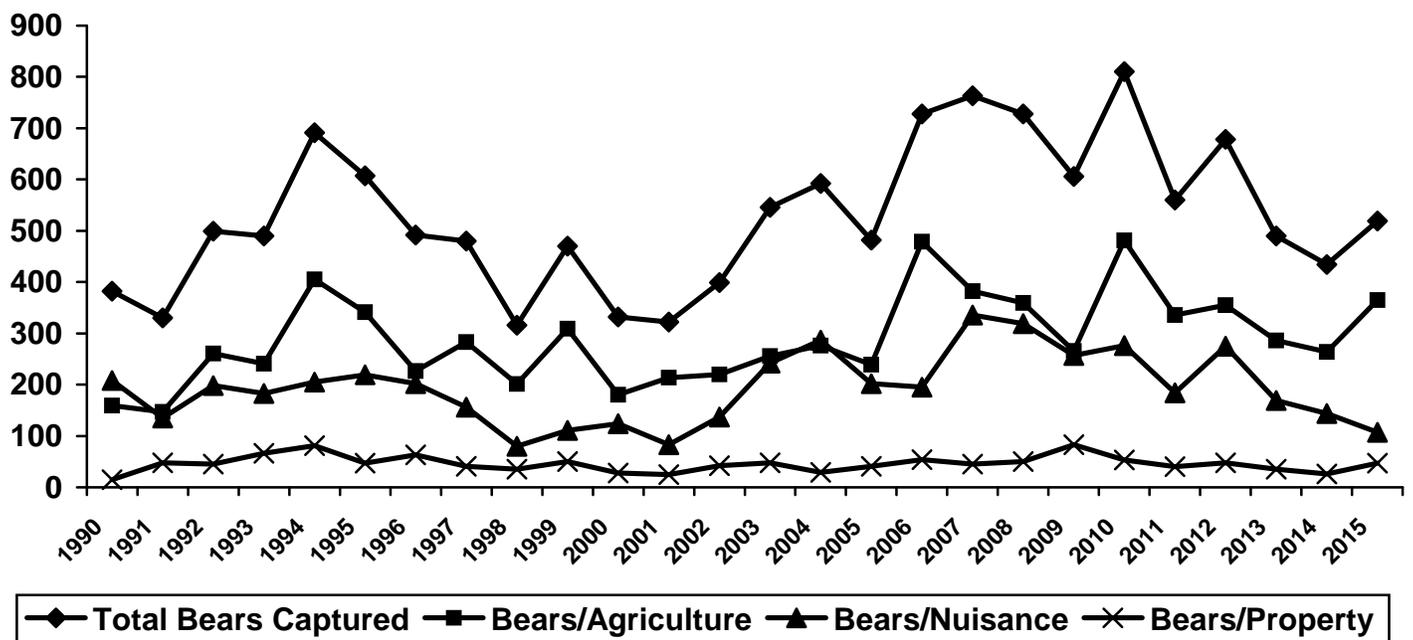


Figure 2. Number of black bears translocated by WS, total and by type of complaint, 1990-2015.