

Black Bear Damage and Nuisance Complaints 2014

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Abstract

The United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services (WS) personnel received 832 bear complaints during calendar year 2014 and trapped and translocated 434 bears. Two hundred sixty-four bears were trapped from agriculture complaints, 144 from nuisance complaints and 26 from property damage complaints. The majority of complaints (n = 543, 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 = 289, 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 2014 marked the twenty-fifth year that WS has assisted WDNR with bear damage/nuisance abatement. Bear complaints in 2014 (832) were up 3% from 2013 (805), and down 42% from the record number of complaints (1,439) received in 1995. The majority of

complaints in 2014 were nuisance complaints (74%), followed by agriculture damage (18%) and property damage (8%) (Figure 1).

WS personnel live-trapped and translocated 434 bears during 2014 (Table 1). Sixty-one percent of the bears trapped and translocated were involved in agriculture damage, although agriculture complaints accounted for only 18% of the total complaints.

A total of 144 bears were trapped and translocated from nuisance complaints, and 26 from property damage complaints. Bear traps were set at 22% of nuisance complaints, while 78% 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 2014, WS or the WDNR euthanized six bears. These bears either depredated livestock, were highly habituated to humans, or entered occupied dwellings.

Four nuisance bear shooting permits and twenty-five agricultural damage bear shooting permits were issued in eleven different counties during the spring, summer, and fall of 2014. One hundred sixteen kill tags were issued to these permit holders, tag numbers ranged from 1 to 15 for each permit holder. At least forty-seven bear were killed under the agriculture damage shooting permits. One bear was killed on a nuisance permit in 2014. In 2013, thirty-eight agriculture damage bear shooting permits were issued with at least forty-three bear being killed. Six nuisance bear shooting permits were issued in 2013 with no 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, 2014.*

COUNTY	AGRICULTURE	NUISANCE	PROPERTY	TOTAL
Ashland	5	3	1	9
Barron	4	1	0	5
Bayfield	14	7	4	25
Burnett	1	21	0	22
Chippewa	0	5	0	5
Douglas	1	10	4	15
Eau Claire	0	1	0	1
Florence	28	2	0	30
Forest	0	3	1	4
Iron	6	1	0	7
Jackson	1	0	0	1
Langlade	8	4	1	13
Lincoln	1	0	0	1
Marathon	0	2	0	2
Marinette	19	12	4	34
Oconto	3	0	0	3
Oneida	3	8	1	12
Polk	14	12	1	27
Portage	3	0	0	3
Price	5	3	1	9
Rusk	31	7	1	39
Sawyer	110	28	3	141
Taylor	5	0	0	5
Washburn	1	13	4	18
Wood	0	1	0	1
Totals	264	144	26	434

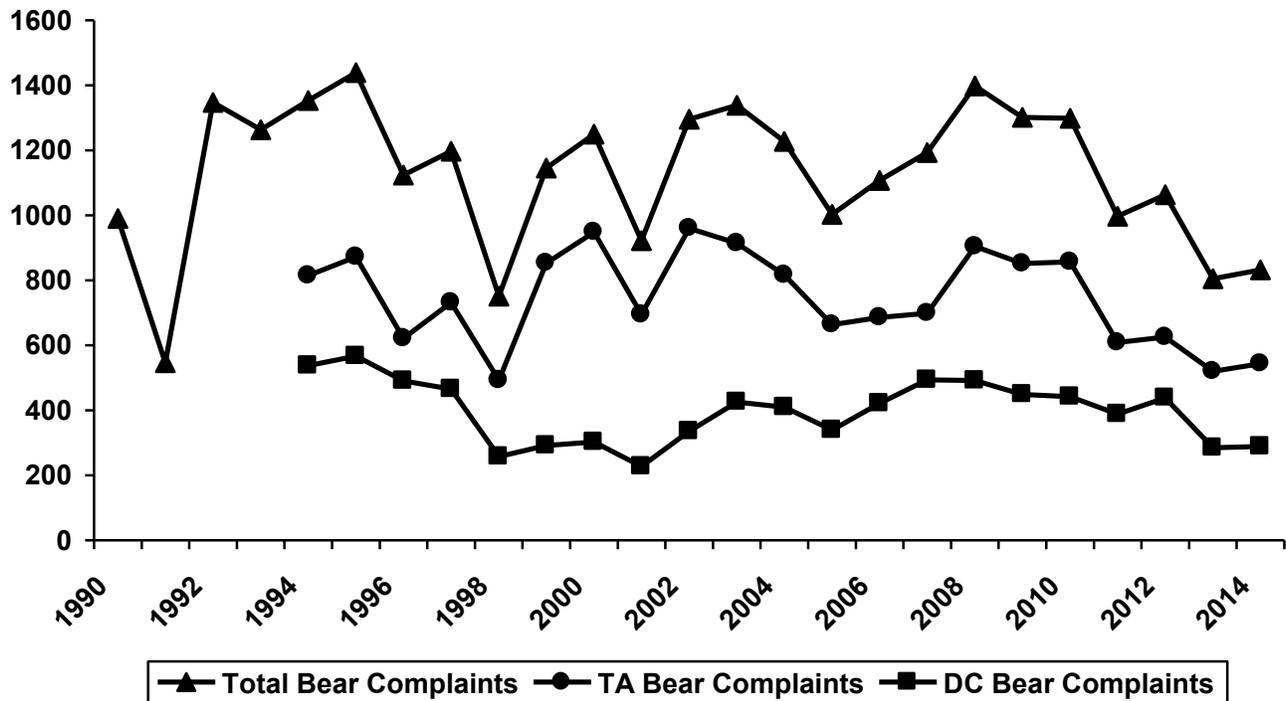


Figure 1. Total black bear complaints, black bear complaints handled with technical assistance (TA) and black bear complaints requiring direct control (DC), 1990-2014.

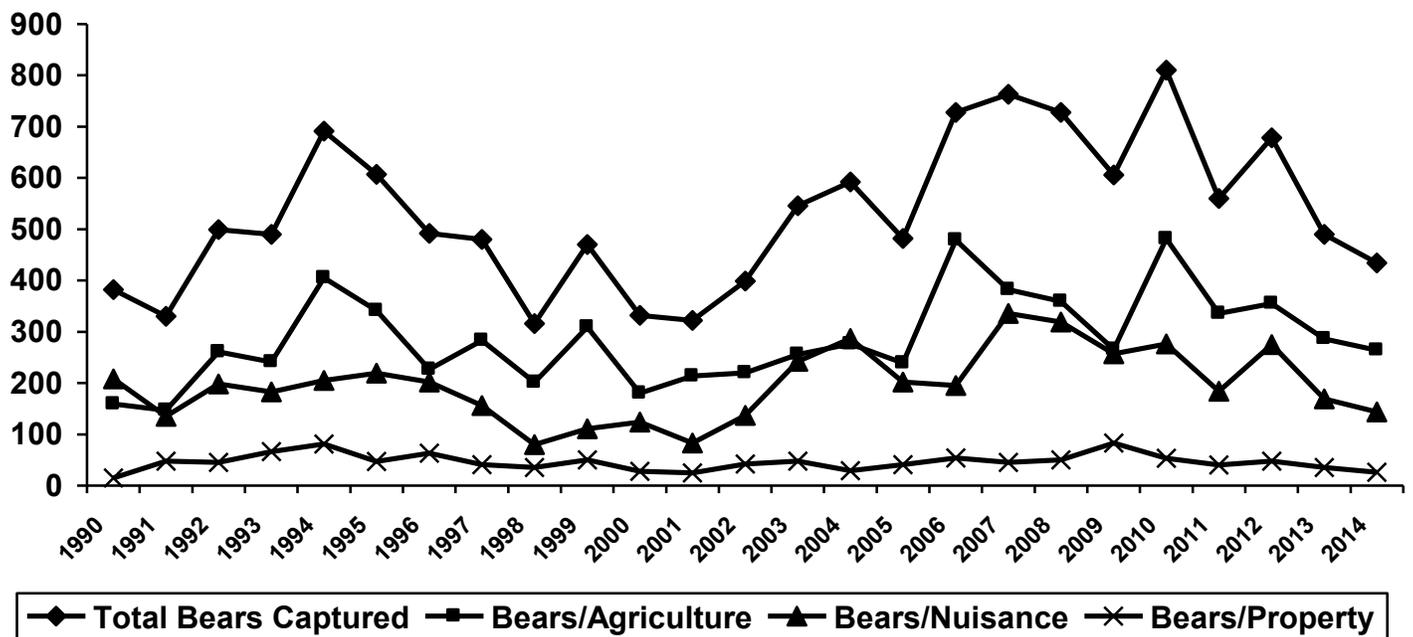


Figure 2. Number of black bears translocated by WS, total and by type of complaint, 1990-2014.