

2023 BEAR SEASON FORECAST

SHAPSHOT WISCONSIN

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The Wisconsin bear population is healthy and thriving. Scientific population models estimate a statewide population abundance of some 26,000 bears, with resident bear populations covering more than half of the state, primarily in the forested regions of northern and central Wisconsin. Bear observations are becoming more common in southern areas of the state as well, as the bear population continues a trend of slow southward expansion.

With abundant bear populations, strong bear hunting traditions and some of the largest black bears in the country, hunters should expect another year of quality bear hunting. Much of the state experienced a late spring followed by drought conditions this summer. This may impact bear hunting this fall. In particular, late frosts and dry summer conditions can lead to reduced production of acorns and various types of berries. These foods comprise major portions of bear diets in the summer and fall. Hunter baits become more attractive when natural food is reduced and may



2023 SEASON DATES

ZONES A, B, D

Sept. 6-12

With aid of dogs only

Sept. 13 to Oct. 3

With aid of dogs, bait and all other legal methods

Oct. 4 to Oct. 10

With aid of bait and all other legal methods,
not using the aid of dogs

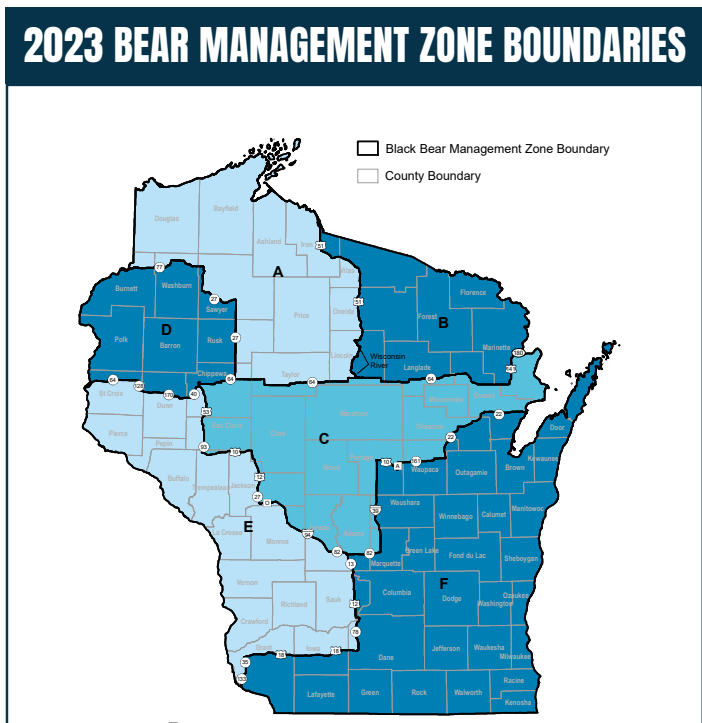
ZONES C, E, F

Sept. 6 to Oct. 10

With all legal methods **not using** the aid of dogs

see increased bear activity, potentially leading to higher hunter success rates. In addition, bears regularly use wetland habitats during the summer and fall. Dry conditions impacting these habitats may shift local bear activity on the landscape. Natural food conditions are variable every year and hunters will do well if they remain diligent with scouting and preparation efforts.

All hunters wishing to hunt bear must apply for one of a limited number of bear harvest authorizations distributed each year through a lottery system. This year, almost 32,000 people applied for one of the 12,760 harvest authorizations available this fall, with another 100,000 purchasing a preference point to improve their chances in a future lottery. This represents yet another record high number of hunters participating in the bear lottery in 2023, showing that interest in bear hunting remains strong and continues to grow.



Wisconsin bear hunter success rates continue to be strong. On average, about one in three bear hunters successfully harvest a bear. In Zones A and B, which cover much of the northern forest, success rates have traditionally been even higher. There, an average of two in three bear hunters have bagged a bear in recent years.

Bear hunters know that the sport provides a unique and exciting outdoor experience with friends and family. We see the increasing popularity of bear hunting in Wisconsin in the growing number of customers who apply for a bear hunting license or preference point each year. Hunters also play a critical role in black bear research. The samples they provide from each harvested bear provide critical data used to monitor the status and health of Wisconsin's bear population into the future.

2023 BEAR SEASON PREVIEW				DRAWING SUMMARY		
Zone	2023 Harvest Target	2023 Licenses Awarded	2023 Population Objective	Number of Applicants	Awarded Licenses	Minimum Preference Points Needed
A	1,075	1,730	Maintain/Increase	10,628	1,730	9
B	850	1,495	Maintain	5,163	1,495	11
C	600	3,000	Maintain	7,478	3,000	2
D	1,800	4,035	Decrease	5,722	4,035	1
E	200	2,000	Maintain	2,225	2,000	1
F	50	500	Allow Local Control	685	500	1
Total	4,575	12,760		31,901	12,760	

*An additional 100,160 people applied for a preference point only.

DAMAGE PROGRAM OFFERS PRIVATE LAND ACCESS FOR BEAR HUNTERS

Bear license holders may hunt on private land enrolled in Wisconsin's Wildlife Damage Program with landowner permission. Through the program, hunters get access to private hunting grounds, and producers get relief from lost agricultural crops due to bears.

For more information on the program requirements or to find private land open to public access, visit the DNR's [damage permit hunting access](#) page. We update the page frequently as additional agriculture producers enroll in the program, so be sure to check back often.

SETTING WISCONSIN'S BEAR HUNTING SEASONS

Black bears fulfill many ecological, social and cultural roles in our state. The goal of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is to ensure a healthy and sustainable black bear population while minimizing bear-related conflicts. Regulated bear harvest is the primary way we can influence the bear population on a regional scale to meet management objectives. We also take action to minimize bear-human conflicts through our wildlife damage program. Addressing bear conflict where it occurs is another important component of black bear management in our state.

[The state's black bear management plan](#) guides the development of each year's bear harvest quota. We consider scientific bear population data, as well as regional data on bear nuisance complaints, agricultural damage, hunter satisfaction, hunter crowding and conflict, hunter success rates and bear health data. Using regional data helps us set population objectives by management zone, including whether to increase, maintain or decrease the bear population in each zone, and then determine harvest quotas to meet those population objectives. From there, we determine the number of licenses based on the quota and average hunter success rates.

Hunters who wish to apply for the fall 2024 bear hunting season or for a preference point toward future seasons have until Dec. 10, 2023, to apply. Applications can be made at any [authorized license agent](#), DNR Service Center or [online](#).



2022 BEAR HARVEST SUMMARY

Zone	2022 Harvest Target	2022 Licenses Awarded	2022 Total Harvest*
A	1,075	1,805	1,192
B	800	1,430	852
C	600	3,000	649
D	1,800	3,680	1,266
E	200	2,000	134
F	25	250	17
Total	4,500	12,165	4,110

*Includes bears taken via Learn to Hunt program (11), Ojibwe tribal harvest (39) and agriculture damage tags (103)