

Hunting bear cubs to be made legal

HARRISBURG — The Pennsylvania Game Commission's proposal to permit hunters to harvest bears of all ages this year won't harm the wildlife resource and is simply a recognition by the agency that the effort to "save" cub bears isn't working, game managers said this week.

Last year 120 hunters who took cub bears in Pennsylvania paid fines for their "mistakes." The cubs were shot in spite of the legal prohibition against it, and this segment of the bear population was largely wasted, since hunters were unable to utilize the young bears.

Taking of cubs is non-controversial from a biological standpoint, since young bears are being shot whether they are legal or illegal to harvest, the Commission said.

Legalization of the harvesting of bears of any age will simply eliminate the penalty traditionally imposed and some of the stigma attached to those who

are fined for not being able to accurately determine the age of a game animal in the wild.

There are at least five important reasons for legalizing the harvest of bears of all ages, the Commission said.

First, the 55-year prohibition against harvesting of cubs has created an enforcement problem, since it is virtually impossible for hunters to distinguish between small legal (over one year old) and large solitary cubs (under one year of age).

Actual live weights of eight male cubs taken in the 1979 Pennsylvania bear season averaged 108 pounds, while dressed weights of about 10 percent of the legal female bears harvested were less than 100 pounds. A 12-year-old female which was recorded in the 1975 harvest weighed 63 pounds.

When young-of-the-year were first protected in 1925, they averaged about 35 or 40 pounds in weight. However, maturation of mast-

producing hardwood forests plus closer contacts with human beings and their occasional or persistent handouts of food or garbage are believed to be responsible for heavier bears today.

Some have advocated that a minimum weight be established for "legal" bears, but the Game Commission says such an approach won't work. Back in the 1920s and 1930s there was a minimum weight for legal fawn deer, and hunters weren't able to determine then when the animal was "big" enough to shoot.

There is no reason to believe a hunter could distinguish between weight classes of bears any easier than the hunter could distinguish between age classes of bears. Hunters have not confined their shooting to large bears in the past, as is shown by the cub harvest figures, and there is no reason to expect a change in the future, the Commission says.

In states where there is a

minimum weight limit for legal bears, dogs are usually used to tree the bears, and hunters have a chance to evaluate the bear's size from a relatively close distance over a period of time before making a decision on whether or not to shoot.

Second, the mortality of cub bears during the bear hunting season seems to be affected little by a legal prohibition against their harvest.

In Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and New York, the percentage of cubs in the total harvest is about the same as it is in Pennsylvania. In those states, harvesting of bears less than a year old is legal.

Last year, 14.3 percent of the bears taken in Georgia were cubs. Cubs are protected in Georgia, as they have been in Pennsylvania. The percentage of cubs in last year's bear harvest in the Keystone State was 13.8.

In an unusual example of what happens after a change is made, there was actually a drop in the percentage of

cubs in the total harvest after the taking of cubs was legalized in New York's Catskill and Allegheny bear range in 1977.

Third, a bear management program such as is being developed in Pennsylvania has a serious shortcoming in that the number of cubs which are being removed is not known. The number of cubs that are left in the woods cannot be determined by game managers with any certainty.

Nor does anyone know how many cubs are taken after their mothers have been harvested. In 1979 the Game Commission had radios attached to two adult females which were accompanied by eight cubs. The females were both harvested. All eight cubs were also shot. Only three of the cubs were turned in to game protectors by the shooters.

Fourth, the cubs which are taken, whether turned in or not, represent the waste of a valuable resource. Those left in the woods are a total waste. In addition, the unreported cub losses make it difficult to measure the impact of hunting on the

bear population.

Finally, there is moral and ethical damage to both well-meaning hunters and the Game Commission when sportsmen are prosecuted at a check station where a wildlife officer inspects the teeth to determine the age of the bear — an aging technique that is not available to the hunter prior to shooting.

In the past, officers on the same day have examined lactating females (at least three and one-half years old) that were legal, and weighed less than 70 pounds, and then had to arrest an individual who had taken a cub which weighed over 125 pounds.

The Game Commission said it will continue to discourage the shooting of small bears, even if cub harvests are legalized, and the agency is hopeful that peer pressure on hunters will discourage the harvesting of young and/or small bears.

But the agency realizes that the shooting of cubs will continue, and by legalizing cub harvesting, the individual hunter will have to make the moral decision on whether or not to shoot a small bear.

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John D. Osborne, Manager, Leola Office, with Marie and Lester W. Martin, East Earl R.D. #2, discussing their 60,000 bird layer operation.



CRS to conduct survey

HARRISBURG — The Pennsylvania Crop Reporting Service will be contacting farmers in late May or early June as part of a nationwide survey to collect information on 1980 crop acreages and livestock numbers.

P.C.R.S. said that farmers' cooperation in supplying facts for the survey will help produce accurate estimates necessary for proper marketing decisions. All information will be kept confidential and used only in developing official state and national estimates.

Wally Evans, chief statistician for the P.C.R.S. said that reports on Spring planted acres will be available to farmers on June 27, followed on July 11 with estimates of yield and production. Hog and pig numbers will be reported on June 20 and cattle inventory July 28.

More information is available by writing the Pennsylvania Crop Reporting Service at 2301 North Cameron Street, room G-19, Harrisburg, PA 17110, or by calling (717) 787-3904.

Camping and day care directories available

LANCASTER — The 1980 edition of the Summer Camping and Recreational Programs for Youth is now available at the Lancaster County Information Center (LINC).

In addition to regular camping activities, the current directory includes extensive listings of day and resident camps serving children with special needs.

These needs include physical handicaps, mentally retarded, adjustment problems and visual and hearing handicaps. These special camps serve both Lancaster and Lebanon Counties.

According to Jean Wedge,

Executive Director of LINC, the 1980 Edition of the Day Care and Pre-School Programs Directory is also available.

This directory includes over 80 full and part day programs for preschoolers and children of working parents.

Copies of the directories may be purchased at the LINC office, 630 Janet Avenue for \$1.50 each.



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