

State limits bear hunters

HARRISBURG — This year there will be no more than 125,000 bear hunters in Pennsylvania. This is the first time in the state's history that the number of bear hunters has been limited.

The signing of legislation establishing a bear license by Governor Dick Thornburgh brings to a close a four-year effort to control the number of bear hunters in the state.

Game Commission studies indicate there are more than 200,000 bear hunters in the state, and the number continues to grow. The increasing hunting pressure on the bear resource led to the necessity for a bear license to control the number of hunters.

The number of bear licenses which will be issued will be established each year by the Game Commission. All bear licenses will be issued by the Game Commission from its headquarters in Harrisburg.

This year a hunter who obtains a license will be able to hunt anywhere in the 32 counties open to bear hunting.

Under the newly-enacted law, no more than three percent of the bear hunters will be nonresidents of the state. Non-residents will pay \$15 for a bear license, while the bear license fee for Pennsylvania residents will be \$5.

Recipients of bear licenses will be chosen in a random selection process.

Guidelines for sale and distribution of bear licenses are being drawn, and should become official when the rule-making process is completed in August. Details will be announced at that time.

Any person who purchases a regular resident or nonresident hunting license will be eligible to apply for a

bear license. Bear license applications will be available from license issuing agents.

The Game Commission will accept applications at a later date for individual or group bear hunting licenses. All members of a group applying for licenses must be either residents of Pennsylvania, or non-residents of the state; a group applying for bear licenses may not consist of both residents and nonresidents.

Up to 15 persons will be able to apply for bear licenses as a group. If the group is selected to receive bear licenses, each member of the party will receive a license; if the group is unsuccessful in its application, no member of the group will receive a license.

No individual or group will be able to take more than one bear.

The actual bear license will be an individual back tag. A bear hunter will be required to display both the regular hunting license and the bear license.

Part of the bear license will be a temporary tag, which will be removed from the license by the successful hunter and attached to the ear of the bear. Each bear harvested must still be taken to a Game Commission bear check station.

Although it is not known exactly how many bear licenses must be issued to harvest a bear, Game Commission wildlife managers do not believe that issuance of 125,000 bear licenses will result in a harvest of 921 bruins, last year's figure.

A harvest of up to 1,000 animals probably would not adversely affect the bear resource, but it is believed that this year hunters will take fewer bears than were tagged in 1980.

Bear hunting problems began to surface back in 1966 and 1967, when bear harvests totaled 605 and 568 animals. Bear harvests were below the 300 mark for the next two years, and the season was then closed in 1970.

Harvests remained at low levels until 1976, when 605 were again taken, leading to a two-year season closure, followed by two more large harvests.

Without a bear license, the Game Commission was unable to control harvests or bear populations. The establishment of a bear hunting license should result in better management of this valuable resource.

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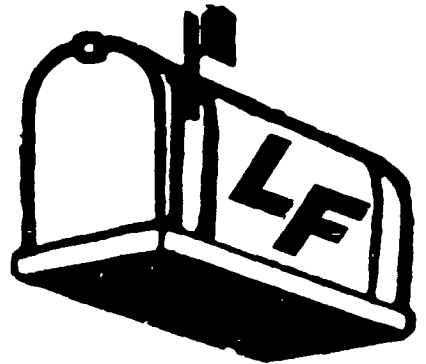
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