

# Black Bear Damage and Nuisance Complaints 2008

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## **Abstract**

The United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services (WS) personnel received 1,396 bear complaints during calendar year 2008 and trapped and translocated 728 bears. Three hundred fifty-nine bears were trapped from agriculture complaints, 319 from nuisance complaints and 50 from property damage complaints. The majority of complaints (n = 904, 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 = 492, 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.

A nuisance bear was characterized as any bear causing problems at bird feeders, garbage cans, dumpsters, campgrounds or similar type situations generally involving a food or scent attractant. Agriculture and property damage bears were 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. Agricultural and property damage complaints are generally resolved by trapping and translocation.

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 sometimes 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 2008 marked the nineteenth year that WS has assisted WDNR with bear damage/nuisance abatement. Bear complaints in 2008 (1,396) were up 15% from 2007 (1,193), and down 3% from the record number of complaints (1,439) received in 1995. The majority of complaints in 2008 were nuisance complaints (79%), followed by agriculture damage (14%) and property damage (6%) (Figure 1).

WS personnel live-trapped and translocated 728 bears during 2008 (Table 1). Forty-nine percent of the bears trapped and translocated were involved in agriculture damage, although agriculture complaints accounted for only 14% of the total complaints.

A total of 319 bears were trapped and translocated from nuisance complaints, and 50 from property damage complaints. Bear traps were set at 29% of nuisance complaints, while 71% 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 2008, WS or the WDNR euthanized nine bears. These bears either depredated livestock, were highly habituated to humans, injured from vehicle collisions, or consistently crossed electric fences.

Agricultural Damage Bear Permits were issued to fifteen farms in 2008. Twenty-eight bears were killed under these 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, 2008.*

<b>County</b>	<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>Property</b>	<b>Nuisance</b>	<b>Total</b>
Ashland	23	3	8	34
Barron	15	1	13	29
Bayfield	29	6	41	76
Burnett	13	6	9	28
Chippewa	0	0	1	1
Douglas	10	13	32	55
Dunn	0	0	1	1
Eau Claire	1	0	0	1
Florence	20	0	1	21
Forest	17	0	18	35
Iron	0	0	6	6
Juneau	0	0	1	1
Langlade	29	4	7	40
Lincoln	35	0	8	43
Marathon	1	0	1	2
Marinette	0	0	19	19
Oconto	0	0	11	11
Oneida	0	3	16	19
Polk	5	0	0	5
Price	13	2	24	39
Rusk	55	1	9	65
Sawyer	75	10	68	153
Taylor	7	0	1	8
Vilas	0	0	19	19
Washburn	8	1	14	23
Waupaca	1	0	0	1
Wood	1	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>728</b>

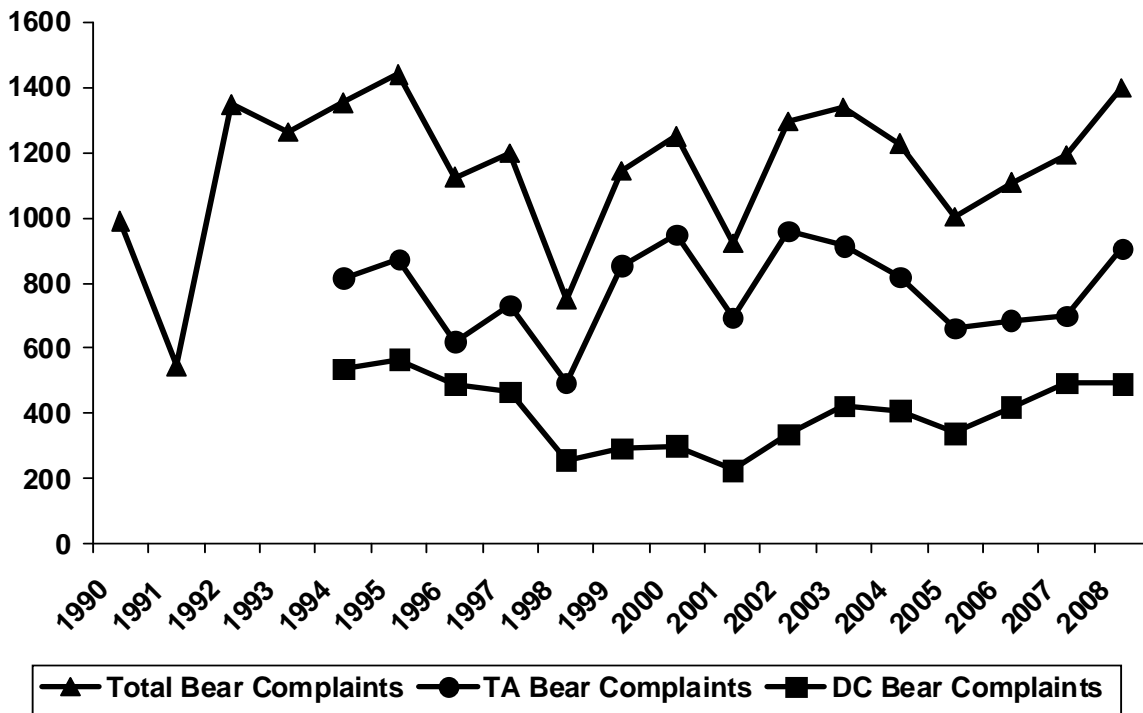


Figure 1. Total black bear complaints, black bear complaints handled with technical assistance (TA) and black bear complaints requiring direct control (DC), 1990-2008.

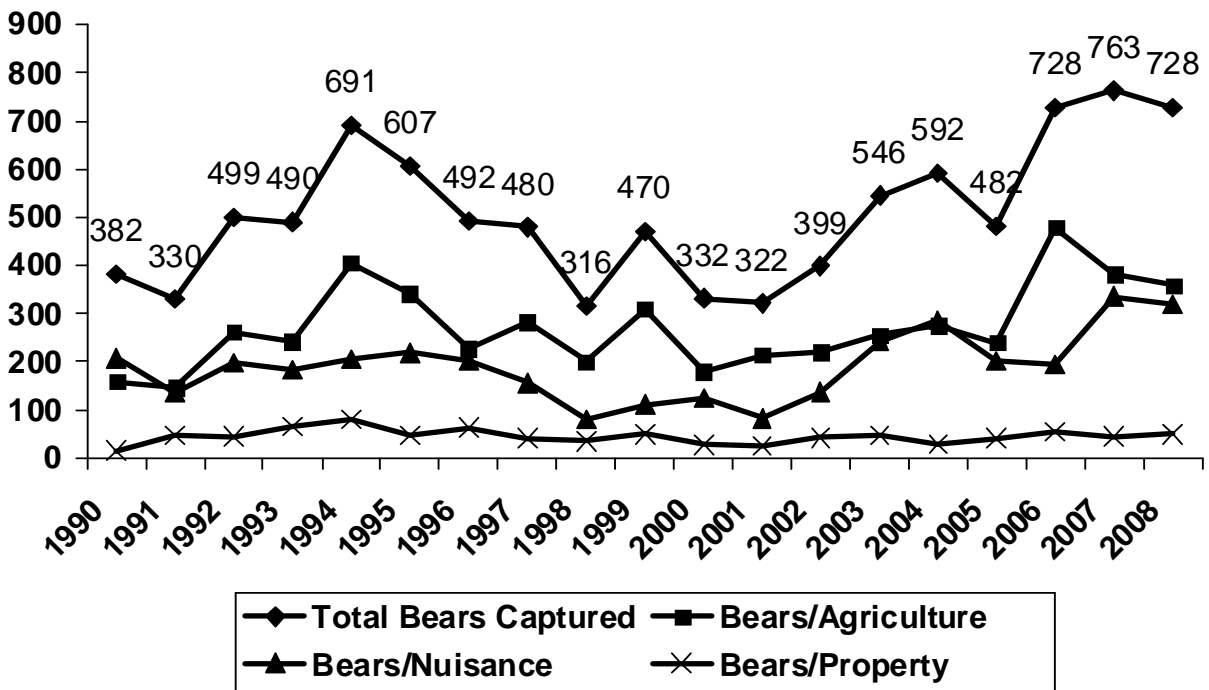


Figure 2. Number of black bears translocated by WS, total and by type of complaint, 1990-2008.