

# Wisconsin Black Bear Harvest Report 2015

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## **Abstract**

Wisconsin bear hunters killed 4,198 black bears during the 2015 season. This was 7% lower than the 2014 kill of 4,526 bears. The 2015 kill was comprised of 52% males and 48% females. The three leading counties of kill were Bayfield, Price, and Douglas.

## **Background**

Wisconsin requires non-Chippewa hunters to obtain a bear harvest permit to kill a bear. The state is divided into four Bear Management Zones (BMZ, Figure 1), and hunters are required to apply for a permit within one of those zones. Kill permits are distributed through a preference point system giving unsuccessful applicants who applied, but did not receive a permit in previous years the first chance to receive a kill permit the following year. Each kill permit allows the taking of one adult bear not accompanied by a cub or cubs in the specified zone.

Wisconsin's bear season has opened on the first Wednesday after Labor Day since the 2000 season. The 2015 bear season ran from 9 September through 13 October (35 days). In the northern 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the state (BMZ A, B and D), hunting with the use of dogs was allowed 9 September- 6 October while the use of bait was allowed during 16 September – 13 October. Hunters in the southern 2/3<sup>ds</sup> of the state (BMZ C) could hunt the entire 35-day season with the use of bait and all methods not utilizing dogs.

## **Methods**

Wisconsin requires non-Chippewa bear hunters to register all bear. Historically, bear were registered at designated WDNR registration stations. This fall marked the first year of electronic registration of bear, all bear were registered through an automated telephone system or through the WDNR registrations website. To complete legal registration, all hunters were required to submit via mail an upper first premolar for age analysis. Data on bear harvested by Chippewa tribal members on ceded lands were obtained from the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC). All kill data is summarized using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS).

## **Results**

A total of 109,088 people applied for a record 10,690 black bear harvest permits in 2015. The number of applicants increased by 0.8% and the number of permits increased 3.4% between 2014 and 2015 (Tables 1 and 10). A total of 10,690 permits were offered to hunters prior to the season. A statewide tetracycline mark-recapture study in 2006 and 2011 resulted in an increased population estimate from previous population estimates for the state. While bear numbers have dropped in parts of the state, the bear population has not declined in response to management actions taken in the Northwest area of the state (Zone D). Quota and permits have remained high in these areas.

During the 2015 season, 10,690 hunters killed 4,198 black bears (39.3% success rate), compared to 4,526 taken in 2014. Males comprised 52.4% (2,198), females 47.6% (2,000) of the harvest (Table 2, Figure 2).

The Northern Region had the highest bear kill (3,240) followed by Northeast (502), West Central (454), South Central (1), and Southeast (1) Regions (Table 2). The most bears were shot in Zone D (1,341) followed by Zones A (1,119), C (972), and B (764) (Table 3 and Figure 1). The five leading counties of kill were Bayfield (410), Price (283), Douglas (269), Rusk (262), and Washburn (250) (Table 4, Fig. 3). Black bear kill by game management unit can be found in Table 5 and Figure 4. This was the first year that bear hunters could register their kills without having to visit an in-person registration station. Many hunters left the game management unit of harvest blank. This year's harvest was the fifth highest in the history of the state.

The number of bear taken over bait alone (2,692; Table 6) was greater than the number shot over dogs (1,396; includes bear shot over dogs and bait). Seventy bear were taken without the use of dogs or bait. Gun hunters took a total of 3,610 bear, while archers killed 403; 145 bear were killed with unreported weapon type (Table 6). Table 7 and Figure 5 summarize the historical Wisconsin black bear kill from 1957 through 2015.

Chippewa hunters killed 40 bear in 2015 (Tables 8 and 9); this was one more than the 39 killed in 2014. More information on the Chippewa bear kill can be obtained by contacting the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC), P.O. Box 9, Odanah, WI 54861.

A total of 825 black bear complaints were filed from January-December 2015. This was slightly less than the number of complaints (832) filed in 2014. As a result, 519 bear were captured and relocated from problem areas. This was more than the 434 that were moved in 2014.

One nuisance bear shooting permit and thirty agricultural damage bear shooting permits were issued in fourteen different counties during the spring, summer, and fall of 2015. One hundred sixty-eight kill tags were issued to these permit holders, tag numbers ranged from 1 to 13 for each permit holder. Sixty-five bear were killed under the agriculture damage shooting permits. No bear were killed on the nuisance permit in 2015. In 2014, twenty-five agriculture damage bear shooting permits were issued with at least forty-seven bear being killed. Four nuisance bear shooting permits were issued in 2014 with one bear being killed under those permits

The Wisconsin corn crop was at or ahead of normal crop development in 2015. This meant that it was past the milk stage prior to the bear season opening. As is usual, a predominance of natural foods during the first part of the bear hunting season may have caused bears to visit bait sites with less regularity and/or reduced bear movements. Despite the abundance of natural foods, bait stations continued to be visited by bears with at least some degree of activity throughout much of the hunting season. Much of September saw above average temperatures with normal precipitation. While the warm conditions may have limited hunter efforts and bear movement, precipitation should not have. Later in the season temperatures were more conducive to hunters pursuing bears. The 2015 bear kill of 4,198 was the fifth highest on record but below the WDNR harvest goal of 4,750 bears. Hunter success in 2015 was 39%, below the long-term average of 54%.

The WDNR Black Bear Advisory Committee, with support from GLIFWC, USFS, Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, and the Wisconsin Conservation Congress established a harvest goal of 4,750 bears for the 2016 season. A total of 11,520 Black Bear harvest permits will be available to hunters to achieve this goal.

**Table 1.** *Harvest goal, number of permits issued, bear kill and percent success, by zone for the 2015 black bear season.*

Zone	Harvest Goal	Permits Issued	Black Bear Kill	Permit Success
A	1,100	1,875	1,119	60%
B	750	1,090	764	70%
C	1,300	5,490	972	18%
D	1,600	2,235	1,341	60%
Unknown			2	
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,750</b>	<b>10,690</b>	<b>4,198</b>	<b>39%</b>

**Table 2.** *Black bear kill by WDNR region, 2015.*

Region	Males	Females	Unreported	Total
Northeastern	299	203	0	502
Northern	1,624	1,616	0	3,240
South Central	0	1	0	1
Southeast	0	1	0	1
West Central	275	179	0	454
Unknown	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,198</b>	<b>2,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4,198</b>

**Table 3.** *Black bear kill by zone, 2015.*

Zone	Males	Females	Unreported	Total
A	588	531	0	1,119
B	368	396	0	764
C	603	369	0	972
D	637	704	0	1,341
Unknown	2	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,198</b>	<b>2,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4,198</b>

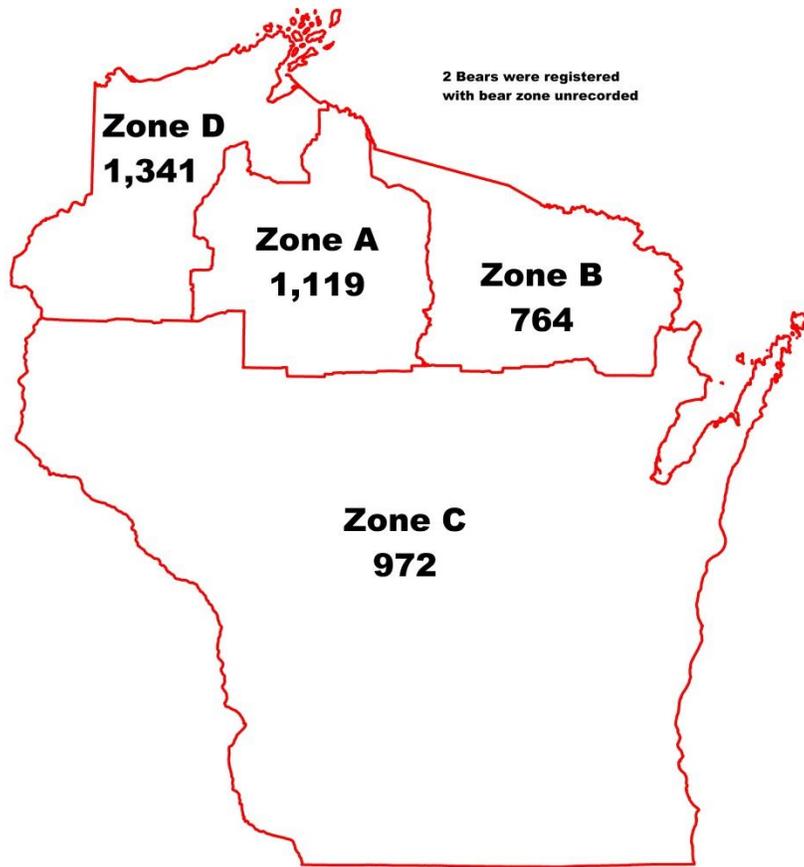


Figure 1. The 2015 black bear kill by zone.

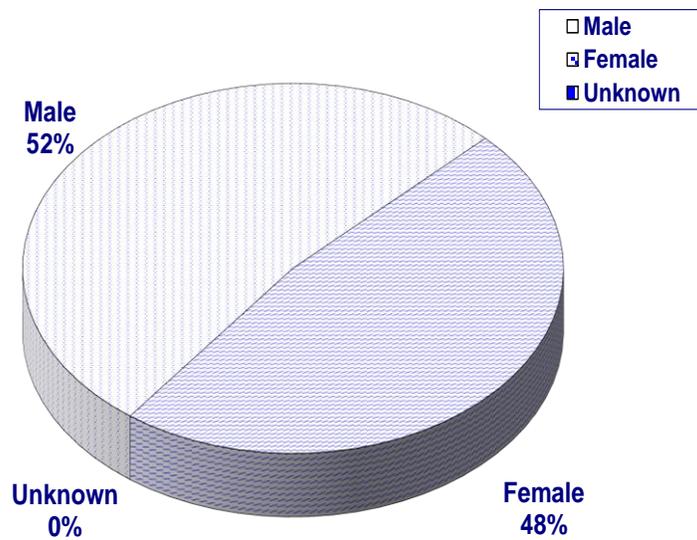


Figure 2. The 2015 black bear harvest by sex.



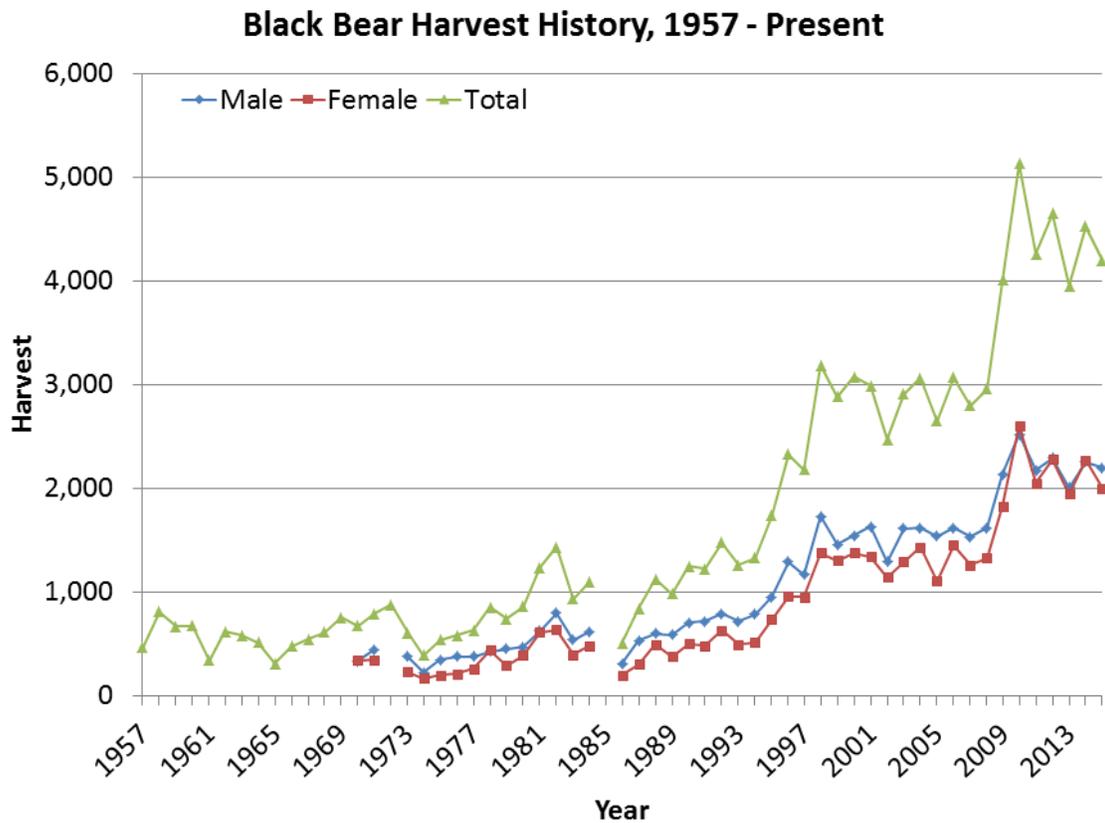


**Table 5.** *The 2015 black bear harvest by game management unit and sex.*

Unit	Males	Females	Unks	Total	Unit	Males	Females	Unks	Total
1	22	14	0	36	44	41	36	0	77
2	59	77	0	136	45	54	45	0	99
3	55	47	0	102	46	34	22	0	56
4	13	18	0	31	47	35	13	0	48
6	50	51	0	101	48	2	1	0	3
7	18	19	0	37	49A	12	18	0	30
8	32	51	0	83	49B	10	14	0	24
9	32	26	0	58	50	22	27	0	49
10	20	31	0	51	51A	20	10	0	30
11	45	38	0	83	51B	38	22	0	60
12	23	45	0	68	52	14	23	0	37
13	64	64	0	128	53	10	3	0	13
14	38	32	0	70	55	17	13	0	30
15	35	35	0	70	56	0	3	0	3
16	7	11	0	18	57	4	1	0	5
17	12	14	0	26	57A	4	6	0	10
18	47	41	0	88	57B	4	3	0	7
19	40	28	0	68	57C	1	1	0	2
1M	5	4	0	9	57D	0	1	0	1
20	28	37	0	65	58	14	18	0	32
21	8	11	0	19	59A	29	17	0	46
22	50	21	0	71	59B	15	8	0	23
22A	23	17	0	40	59C	7	6	0	13
23	54	43	0	97	59D	1	0	0	1
23A	2	0	0	2	60A	1	0	0	1
24	26	32	0	58	60B	8	2	0	10
25	42	36	0	78	60M	2	0	0	2
26	19	22	0	41	61	4	2	0	6
27	23	13	0	36	62A	7	4	0	11
28	57	39	0	96	62B	7	5	0	12
29A	18	5	0	23	63A	3	1	0	4
30	17	22	0	39	63B	4	2	0	6
31	21	23	0	44	64M	1	0	0	1
32	21	29	0	50	65A	1	0	0	1
33	23	10	0	33	65B	0	1	0	1
34	10	6	0	16	67B	0	1	0	1
35	6	15	0	21	65A	1	0	0	1
36	7	10	0	17	65B	0	1	0	1
37	5	12	0	17	67B	0	1	0	1
38	26	23	0	49	68A	0	1	0	1
39	29	29	0	58	74A	0	1	0	1
40	19	25	0	44	78	1	2	0	3
41	13	11	0	24	79	1	1	0	2
42	23	23	0	46	Unknown	531	472	0	1,003
43	37	29	0	66	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,198</b>	<b>2,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4,198</b>

**Table 6.** The 2015 black bear kill by hunting method and weapon type (does not include Chippewa harvest of 40 bear).

Method	Weapon			Total
	Bow	Gun	Unreported	
Dogs	12	589	9	610
Bait	368	2,204	120	2,692
Dogs and Bait	15	763	8	786
None	2	26	0	28
Unknown	6	28	8	42
<b>Total</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>3,610</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>4,158</b>



**Figure 5.** Black bear kill, 1957-2015.

**Table 7. Black bear kill by sex, 1957-2015.**

Year	Male	Female	Unk	Total	Year	Male	Female	Unk	Total
1957	---	---		460	1987	533	304		837
1958	---	---		811	1988	601	494	30	1,125
1959	---	---		665	1989	584	375	19	978
1960	---	---		675	1990	705	501	41	1,247
1961	---	---		337	1991	715	480	24	1,219
1962	----	---		617	1992	789	631	54	1,474
1963	---	---		579	1993	715	494	49	1,258
1964	---	---		511	1994	781	513	34	1,328
1965	---	---		308	1995	953	735	49	1,737
1966	---	---		475	1996	1,288	955	82	2,325
1967	---	---		541	1997	1,165	950	63	2,178
1968	---	---		613	1998	1,727	1,378	79	3,184
1969	---	---		752	1999	1,456	1,301	124	2,881
1970	331	341		672	2000	1,543	1,376	156	3,075
1971	444	347		791	2001	1,632	1,336	18	2,986
1972	---	---		878	2002	1,290	1,143	38	2,471
1973	376	230		606	2003	1,613	1,288	4	2,905
1974	224	166		390	2004	1,618	1,433	12	3,063
1975	344	195		539	2005	1,537	1,107	1	2,645
1976	373	206		579	2006	1,615	1,448	5	3,068
1977	375	256		631	2007	1,528	1,261	8	2,797
1978	426	436	10	872	2008	1,616	1,324	15	2,955
1979	449	288		737	2009	2,135	1,828	46	4,009
1980	469	386		855	2010	2,519	2,602	12	5,133
1981	624	610		1,234	2011	2,171	2,047	39	4,257
1982	797	636		1,433	2012	2,287	2,275	84	4,646
1983	539	395		934	2013	2,005	1,888	59	3,952
1984	617	480		1,097	2014	2,255	2,210	61	4,526
1985	No	Season			2015	2,198	2,000	0	4,198
1986	308	195		503					

**Table 8.** *The 2015 Tribal black bear kill by game management unit and sex<sup>1</sup>.*

Unit	Male	Female	Total
02	1	3	4
03	3	3	6
04		1	1
06	2	2	4
08		1	1
10	1		1
11	2		2
13		1	1
17		1	1
26	1	1	2
29A	1		1
29B	1		1
36	1		1
37		1	1
38	2		2
39	1		1
44	1	3	4
45	2	3	5
49A		1	1
Total	19	21	40

<sup>1</sup> These data are included in the statewide totals.

**Table 9.** *The number of black bear harvest permits issued and the number of applicants, 1974-2016.*

Year	Residents	Non-residents	No. Permits Issued	No. of Applicants
1974	3,459		3,459	3,459
1975	4,116		4,116	4,116
1976	4,899		4,899	4,899
1977	5,025		5,025	5,025
1978	6,283		6,283	6,283
1979	5,612	179	5,791	5,791
1980	6,352	171	6,523	6,523
1981	7,247	241	7,488	7,488
1982	8,142	224	8,366	8,366
1983	7,077	218	7,295	7,295
1984	6,439	320	6,759	6,759
1985		Season	Closed	
1986			840	8,289
1987			1,730	10,203
1988			1,663	10,208
1989			2,020	13,734
1990			2,825	15,988
1991			2,560	17,668
1992			2,620	19,415
1993			2,110	22,555
1994			2,175	25,799
1995			2,710	30,086
1996			4,570	35,356
1997			4,700	41,969
1998			5,860	44,928
1999			6,014	50,938
2000			6,598	50,601
2001			5,681	53,508
2002			4,985	54,879
2003			4,710	56,944
2004			4,741	61,726
2005			4,549	66,777
2006			4,277	68,821
2007			4,405	80,213
2008			4,660	86,138
2009			7,310	95,384
2010			8,910	97,467
2011			9,005	103,854
2012			9,015	104,391
2013			8,560	106,573
2014			10,340	108,271
2015			10,690	109,088
2016			11,520	109,221