The outlook is bright for the 2018 Wisconsin black bear season. Population models continue to suggest healthy bear numbers across the state’s primary bear range, with the most recent population estimate indicating there are 28,700 bears statewide. Bear densities across the majority of Wisconsin’s occupied bear range are in excess of 1 bear per square mile, so hunters can expect to encounter bears with a little effort and time spent in the woods. A healthy bear population and flexible season structure, whereby hunters are free to pursue bears either with hounds (Bear Management Zones A, B, and D only) or over bait, has made Wisconsin a national leader in hunter interest, participation and harvest. Reflecting this interest, over 124,000 hunters applied for either a harvest permit or preference point for the 2018 season, and a total of 12,970 hunters were awarded permits for the upcoming season. Wisconsin offers abundant access to both public and private land on which to hunt, including federal, state, and county forests and private land enrolled in the state’s Managed Forest Law or Voluntary Public Access programs. Go to dnr.wi.gov and search “public lands” to locate available hunting land in your area.

Wisconsin bear hunters harvested 4,159 bears during the 2017 season, or 83.2% of the statewide quota of 5,000 bears. Annual quotas are established by the DNR Bear Advisory Committee, with input from members representing the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, the United States Forest Service, Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, Wisconsin Conservation Congress, Farm Bureau, Wisconsin Bowhunters Association, and Safari Club International. The committee established a quota of 4,550 bears for the 2018 season.

The DNR is currently working with numerous partner groups to revise the state’s Black Bear Management Plan. This document will provide guidance regarding black bear population goals, harvest regulations, population monitoring, and future research needs. As with all DNR efforts, the plan will provide the public ample opportunity for input. Please go to dnr.wi.gov and search “bear” or “public meetings” to keep abreast of developments related to this exciting venture, and for upcoming opportunities for you to voice your ideas regarding the future of bear management in Wisconsin.
Black Bear

Top things to know

1. There are 4 bear management zones in Wisconsin (see map). Population goals and harvest quotas are developed for each zone, and licenses are zone-specific.

2. Individuals of any age may now apply for preference points or a Class A bear license.

3. Harvested bears must be registered by 5 p.m. on the day following harvest. Hunters have two convenient options to register their bear: electronically at gamereg.wi.gov, or by phone at (844) 426-3734 (844-GAME-REG).

4. Successful hunters must also submit a tooth. This tooth allows DNR biologists to determine the bear’s age, and is an important component of our bear population monitoring program. New in 2018, successful hunters in Zone B will need to submit two (2) teeth; the additional information will help support a population assessment pilot project in the zone. All successful applicants will receive information about tooth submission in the mail prior to the season.

5. A reminder that the deadline to apply for a preference point or bear license in Wisconsin is December 10th each year.
Black Bear
Management Zone Map

Black Bear Management Zone Boundary
County Boundary

Bad River Reservation
Eastern Boundary of Bad River Reservation

Wisconsin River

Fort McCoy

2018 Fall Hunting and Trapping Forecast