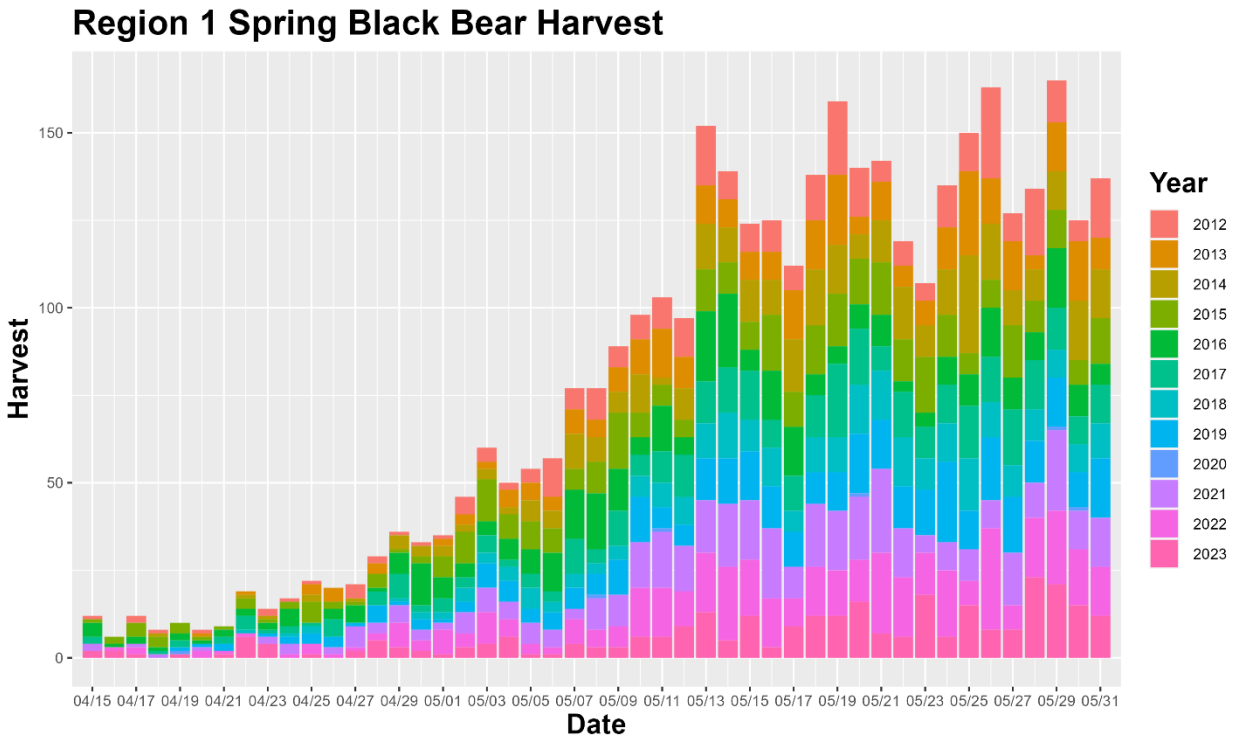
Region 1 Spring Black Bear Harvest and Access Summary - 2023

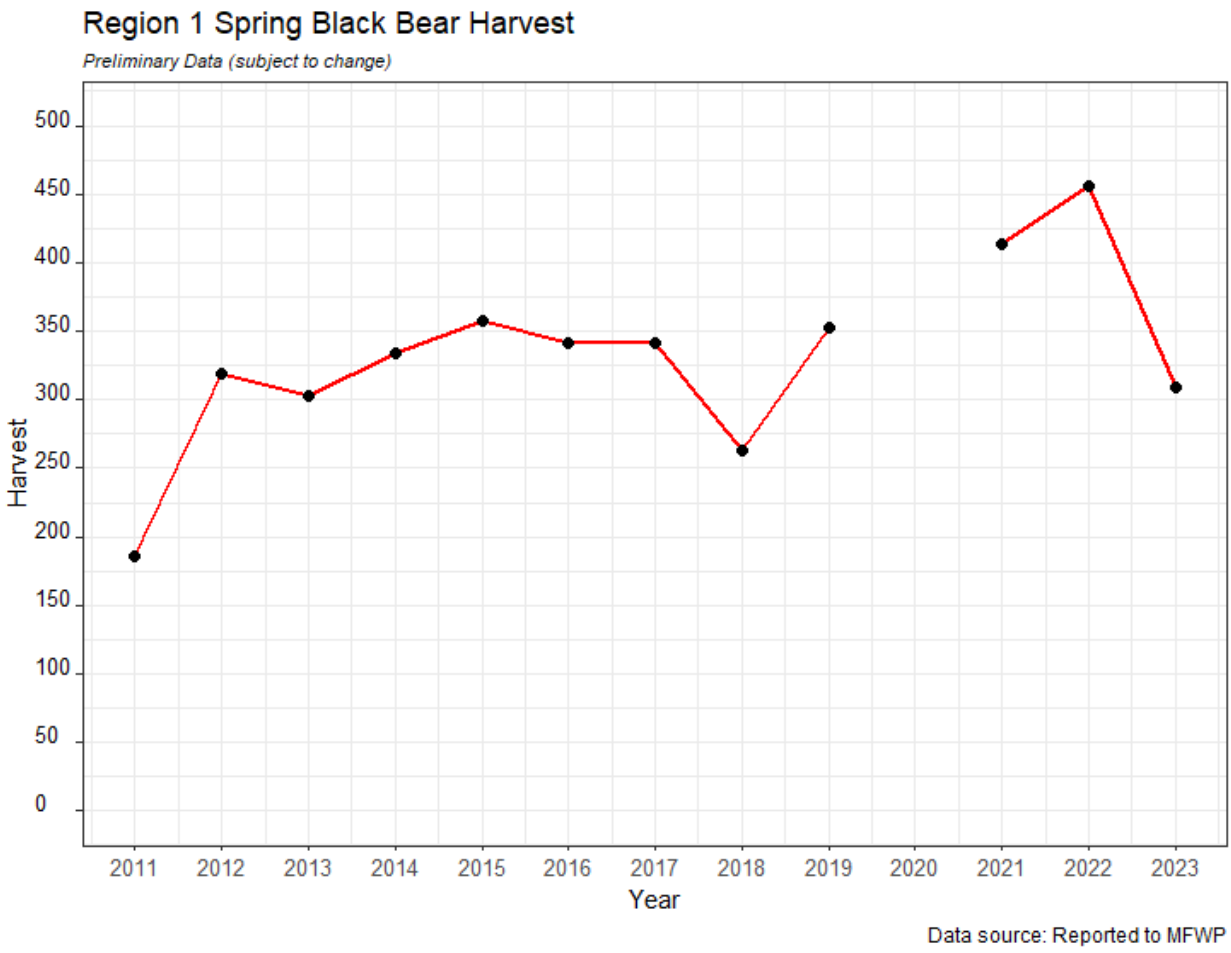
Hunt Timing

Den emergence is important to consider when planning your spring black bear (hereafter bear) hunt. Typically, adult males emerge first, followed by sub-adults, then females without cubs, and finally females with cubs. Timing of emergence is closely linked to various climate factors such as temperature and snow depth. Because lower elevations warm quicker, reducing snow cover and increasing forage production, bears denned at lower elevations typically emerge prior to bears denned at higher elevations. Similarly, during mild springs, bears emerge earlier than years with late persistent snowpack and colder spring temperatures. In Region 1 of Montana, spring bear harvest increases through mid-May and remains steady for the rest of the season. There are numerous sources for up-to-date weather conditions online (e.g., NOAA and National Phenology Network).

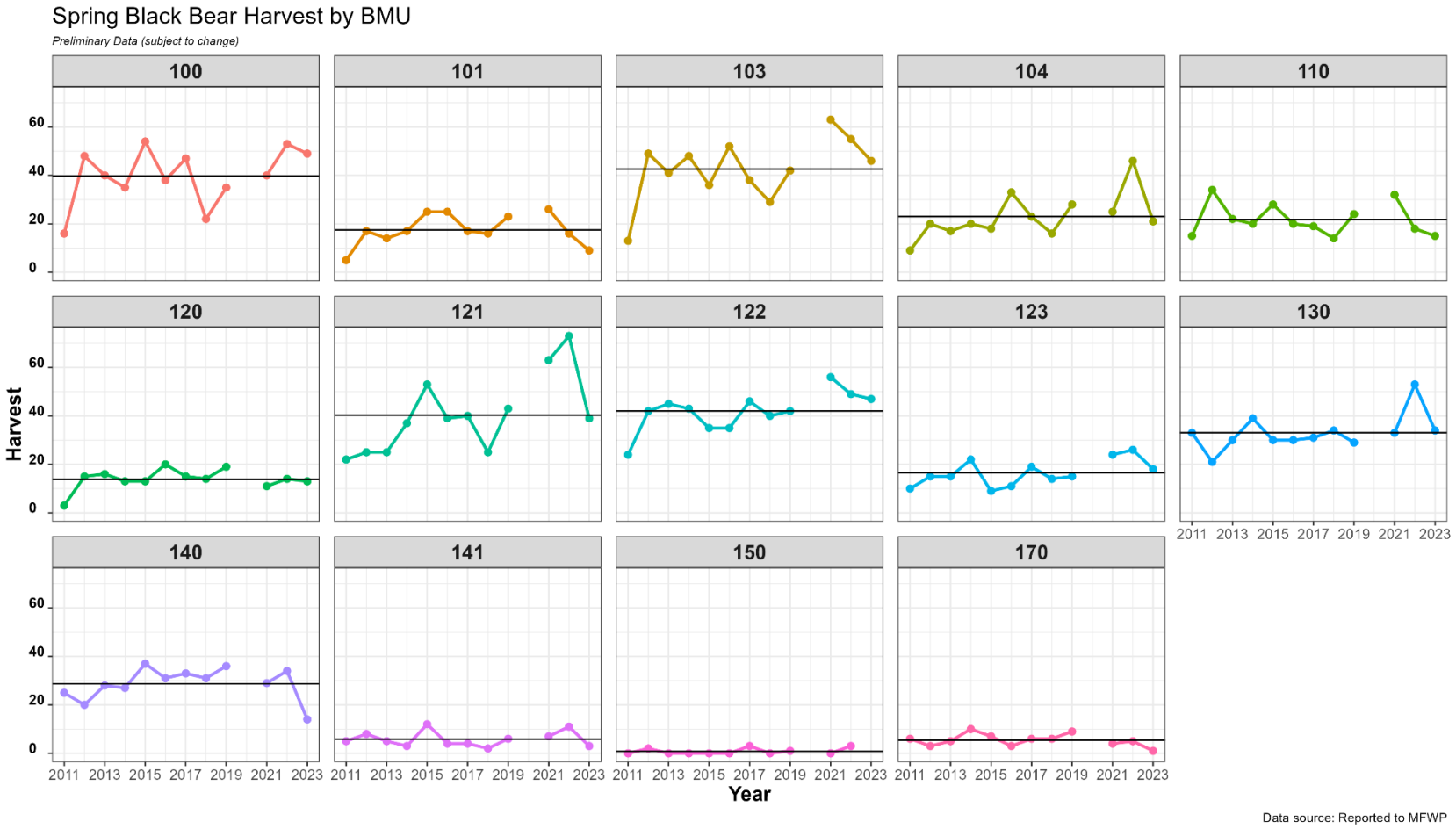


Bear Populations

Northwestern Montana bear populations are tracked via hunter harvest. Spring harvest in Region 1 is the highest of any region in Montana, and has fluctuated from 186 (2011) to 456 (2022) over the last 12 years with an average of 331 bears harvested each year (Fig. 2). Harvest reports can be found on FWP's website (https://myfwp.mt.gov/fwpPub/harvestReports) and provide further breakdown of each Region and bear management unit (BMU) bear harvest including spring vs. fall, male vs. female, and resident vs. non-resident (pressure) information.



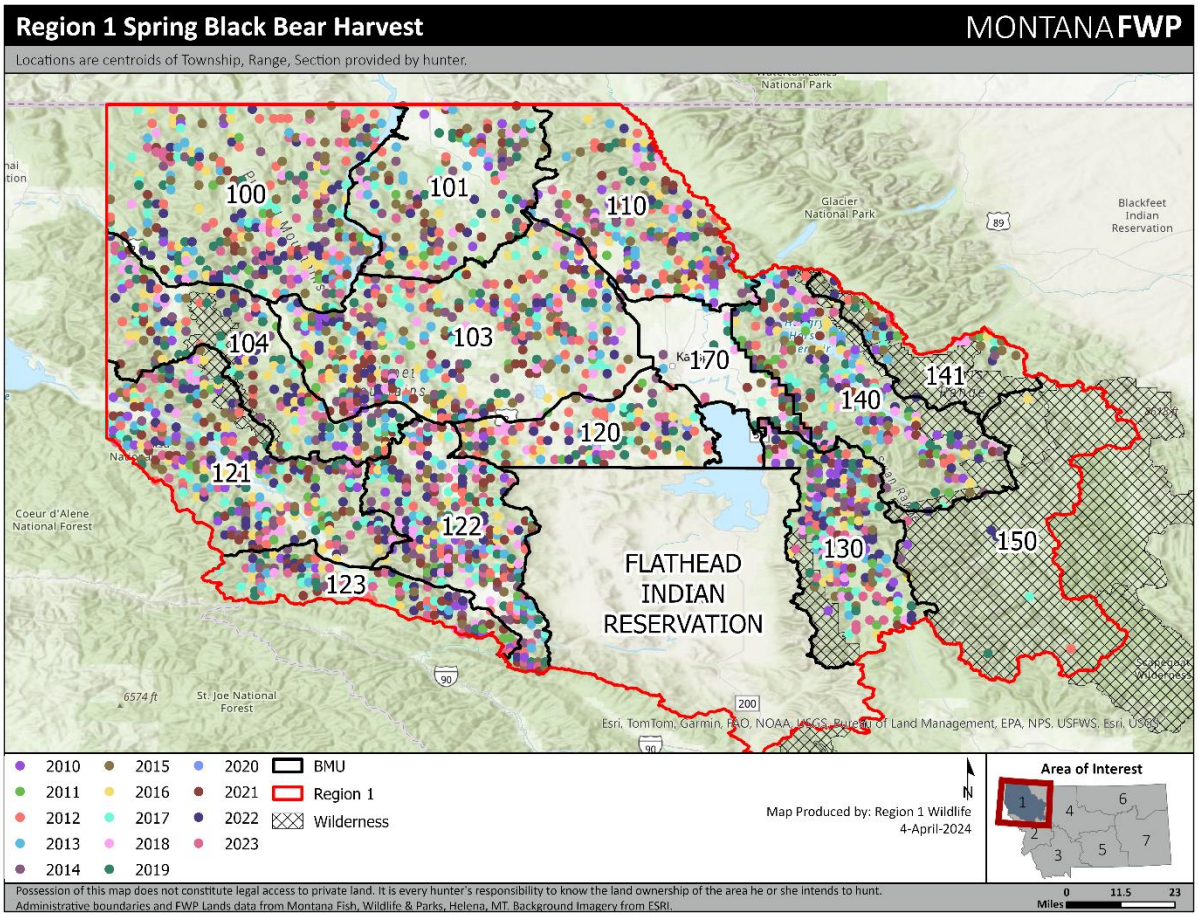
Harvest ranges widely across BMUs with those primarily or solely in wilderness areas (141, 150) or with high human populations and little public land (170) having the lowest harvest. These data along with other helpful information (e.g., BMU maps, hunting in grizzly country) can be found on FWP's website (https://fwp.mt.gov/hunt/regulations/black-bear). Weather can also greatly affect bear harvest due to its impacts on den emergence, resource use, and access. Lastly, because BMUs vary in size, higher total harvest does not necessarily translate to higher bear densities. It is helpful to consider what kind of hunt you would like.



Spring black bear harvest by BMU with their respect average (black line).

Harvest Location

After emerging from their den, bears are seeking to replenish their fat reserves. This results in them seeking areas of increased forage production. South facing slopes with reduced canopy cover are typically the first to green up and are often a good place to look for bears in the spring. Using free online satellite imagery software (e.g., Google Earth) can be a helpful tool for choosing areas to target. However, due to their generalist nature, bears are evenly distributed across the landscape and can be found almost anywhere. Looking at black bear spring harvest locations does not provide any particularly helpful information with most harvests typically occurring near roads, likely due to the access they provide.



Access

Much of Region 1 is heavily forested mountainous terrain with elevations ranging from 1,800 ft to 9,000 ft. Most public land in northwestern Montana is owned and managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). USFS also maintains (open/closed) the roads accessing USFS land. FWP does not provide Forest Service maps, but they are available online (search for the Forest in which you'd like to hunt). Additional land available for public hunting includes state trust (DNRC), Wildlife Management Areas (WMA; FWP), wildlife refuges (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), or private land enrolled in block management which is primarily corporate timberland. Information on block management, as well as downloadable maps can be found on our website (https://fwp.mt.gov/hunt/access/blockmanagement). Information about WMAs can be found on our website, including a description, location, rules, and open/close dates (https://fwp.mt.gov/conservation/wildlife-management-areas). Some things to consider might include: Where you can "spot-and-stalk", places that might be more accessible even in high-snow years, where there are higher closed roads to walk or avalanche chutes to glass, etc).

BMU	Public Land (%)	BMA Acres (2023)	WMA Acres	Approx. Elevation Range (ft)
100	90	29,659	1,072	1,800-7,600
101	79	1,306	1,486	2,630-7,000
103	51	291,990	0	2,300-6,300
104	77	56,270	0	2,300-6,900
110	85	10,322	0	3,000-7,600
120	27	102,986	0	2,900-6,000
121	83	11,064	1,552	2,150-7,950
122	54	145,527	517	3,00-7,000
123	81	5,086	0	2,200-6,000
130	90	0	1,886	3,750-9,400
140	93	0	0	3,200-8,500
141	98	0	0	3,200-8,700
150	100	0	0	4,000-9,000
170	7	805	2,783	3,000-3,900