

**FWP proposal to be amended:** Black Bear Regulations

**Commissioner:** Brian Cebull

**Date Received by Commission:**

**Proposed Amendment:** I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt the following amendment to the proposed 2024 and 2025 Black Bear Regulations:

1. Set a statewide spring hunting season closure for Black Bear to June 15.
2. Expand to statewide the Region 1 pilot that allowed hunters to submit extracted teeth instead of having to present a head and carcass. Also require that each hunter submit 2 molars instead of 1.

**Requested by FWP:** No

**Rationale and Background:** A standard spring season statewide closing date of June 15 will simplify regulations, provide accommodation for variable spring weather events, and afford sustainable hunting opportunities.

Since black bear harvests are managed based on BMU/HD quotas a standardized closing date of June 15 would only remain if the quota was unfilled. Conversely the closure of BMU/HDs on June 1, when quotas are yet to be filled, is an unnecessary loss of otherwise sustainable hunting opportunity.

There are many examples but several that most poignantly illustrate the issue:

HD 393, HD 690, and HD 680, all have a June 1st closure for black bear.

- HD 393 is next to Bridger Bowl Ski Area. There are a lot of bears in that area, but access is usually a nightmare in May due to late winter and heavy snowpack. To the east is US Forest Service and it is very popular with public land hunters during the big game season. However, this same country sees little black bear hunting in the spring due to the inaccessibility imposed by a June 1 closing. As a result, black bear quotas are not filled, hunting opportunities are lost, and black bear density remains high.
- Region 5 is a mountainous area with a normally deep snowpack that prevents access for bear hunters, forcing all the activity on the lower lands. Significantly more opportunity, in both time and area, could be had with a June 15 closure.

The Commission approved the pilot in Region 1 during the 2022-23 season setting process to allow hunters to extract and submit their own tooth samples instead of having to present the carcass and head to the department. Based on the success of the pilot, this practice should be expanded statewide. As recommended by Region 1, hunters should be required to submit 2 premolar teeth instead of one to ensure good quality samples. Also, hunters who intend to mail extracted tooth samples should be educated on how to package them so they are not lost or damaged in the mail.

**Department response:**

The department would recommend that if the bear season is extended to June 15 statewide, any bear management unit that currently has a quota or subquota would retain it, Bear Management Unit 580 would adopt a female bear quota of 11 in the fall and 12 in the spring, and any bear management unit that does not have a quota would be closed at any point after May 31 if the spring harvest comprised

≥37% female bears. All bear management units that already extend to June 15 would remain unchanged. With these adjustments, the department does not anticipate any adverse effects from the proposed amendment.

Regarding mandatory tooth submission in lieu of mandatory physical inspections, the department would prefer a second year of data to determine the adequacy of the pilot program for bear data collection before expanding the efforts to other regions. If this amendment is adopted, the department would recommend that physical inspections remain mandatory in Regions 5, 6, and 7 due to the relatively small number of bears harvested in those regions. The department would also recommend any regions where hunters are no longer required to present their harvested bear retain the requirement to report their harvest within 48 hours through the harvest reporting phone line.