



Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

Black Bear *Ursus americanus*

State Status: **None**
Federal Status: **None**

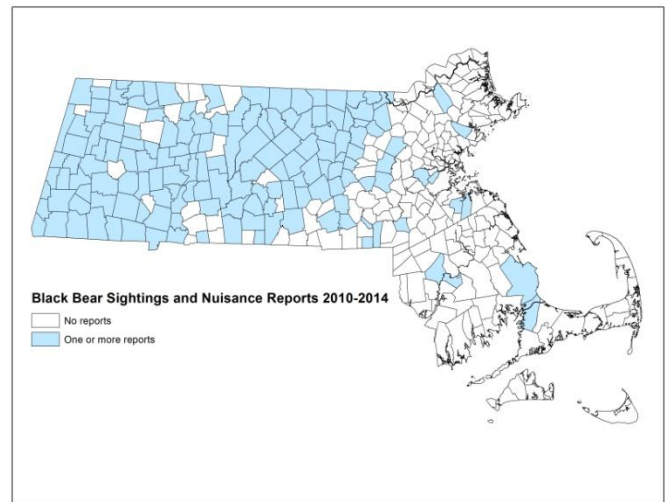
SPECIES DESCRIPTION: Black Bears are stocky and large-bodied with sturdy legs and flat, five-clawed feet and coarse, shaggy pelage. Black Bears have small eyes, small rounded ears and a short tail. Although they may be brown or cinnamon-colored in open western habitats, almost all Black Bears in eastern deciduous forest are entirely black except for a brown muzzle and occasionally a white chest patch. Black Bears range from 100 to 250 kg for adult males and 50 to 100 kg for adult females. Body length ranges from 1 to 2 m.



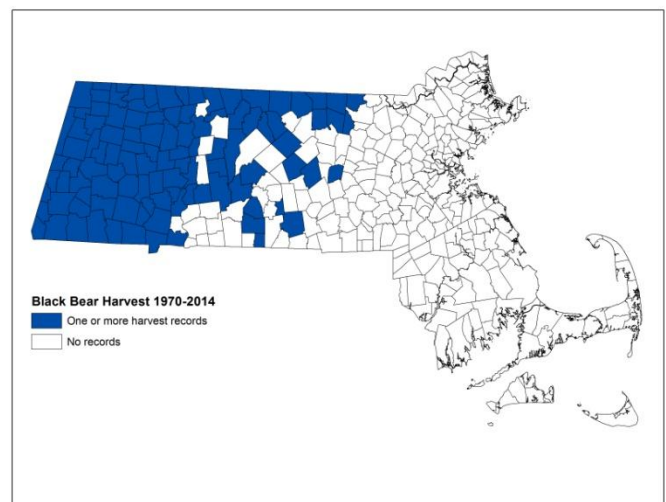
Photo by Bill Byrne, MassWildlife

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE: Black Bears are common in western and central Massachusetts and are becoming increasingly more common in northeastern Massachusetts. Occasional vagrants occur in eastern and southeastern Massachusetts. In 2011, there were 4,000-

4,500 bears in Massachusetts, with the population increasing at about 8% annually. Black Bears may be hunted in Wildlife Management Zones 1-9.



Massachusetts Towns with Black Bear sightings and nuisance reports (2010-2014)



Massachusetts Towns with Black Bear harvest records (1970-2014)

A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

1 Rabbit Hill Rd., Westborough, MA; tel: 508-389-6300; fax: 508-389-7890; www.mass.gov/dfw

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: Black Bears are forest animals. However, they have the ability to exploit a wide array of physiographic and vegetative associations. These may vary in climate, soils, and topography, which consequently affect the quantity, quality, and availability of food, which is the primary determinant of Black Bear home range size, movements, and habitat use. Suitable Black Bear habitat is characterized by mature forest interspersed with small openings and tracts of early successional forest. The eastern deciduous forests, with their abundance and variety of foods, including acorns and other nut crops, yield the greatest Black Bear growth rates. In Massachusetts, wetlands are important to Black Bears in spring and summer, early successional and berry-producing areas in summer, and hardwood ridges in autumn.

THREATS: Although the Black Bear is the least threatened of the eight bear species and is stable or increasing in most of its range, it faces both short-term and long-term threats to its survival. Habitat fragmentation poses a serious risk to species (such as the Black Bear) with large home ranges and a sexually selected dispersal pattern. The consequent introgression of these large carnivores into human-dominated landscapes poses substantial ecological and conservation challenges. Alterations to bear habitat may degrade or modify the food biomass available to bear and coincidentally induce changes in bears' tolerance to humans, and that of humans to bears. Alterations to landscape mosaics, disruption of climatic cycles, rises in pollutant levels, draining of wetlands and waterways, and the proliferation of anthropogenic food sources will all affect the ability of the landscape to sustain Black Bears.

REFERENCES

- Fuller, D.P. 1993. Black bear population dynamics in western Massachusetts. M.S. thesis, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 136pp.
- Pelton, M.R. 2003. Black bear. Pages 547-555 in G.A. Feldhamer, B.C. Thompson, and J.A. Chapman (eds.). *Wild Mammals of North America: Biology, Management, and Conservation*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland.
- Servheen, C., S. Herrero, and B. Peyton (compilers). 1999. Bears: status survey and conservation action plan. International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Gland, Switzerland, 309pp.

For more information on Black Bears in Massachusetts, see: <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/fish-wildlife-plants/mammals/black-bear-mass.html>