



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

BLACK BEAR HARVEST SUMMARY 2023



Brandon Dale with the 315 lb. male black bear he took in Orange County, Town of Deerpark, WMU 3M, during the early season.



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Black Bear Harvest Summary & Trends

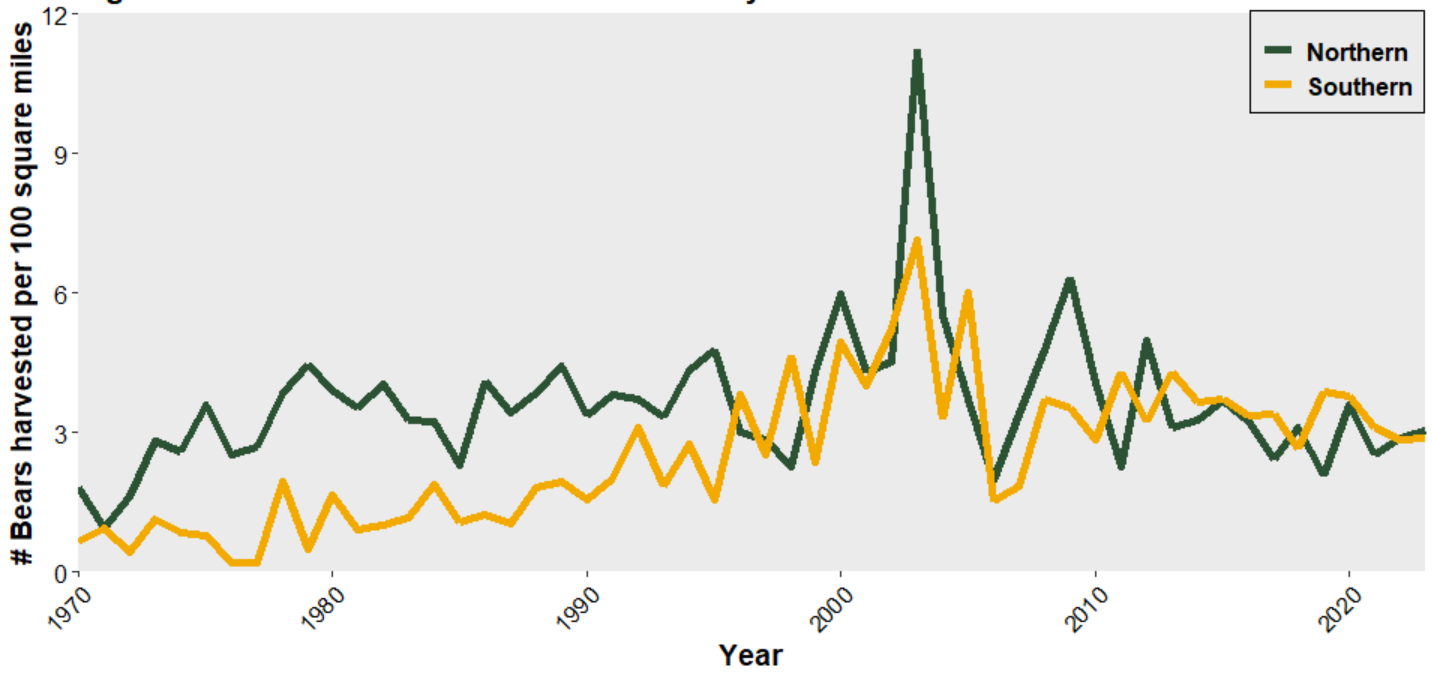
During New York’s 2023 big game hunting seasons, hunters harvested an estimated 1,356 black bears with 485 bears harvested in the Northern Zone and 871 bears harvested in the Southern Zone. This was a slight increase in bear harvest from the 2022 seasons (# = 1,318), but remained below the five- (# = 1,450) and ten-year (# = 1,484) bear harvest averages. An estimated 902 bears were harvested during the regular season, followed by the bow (# = 318), early (# = 104), muzzleloader (# = 29), and youth (# = 3) seasons. Hunters harvested a slightly greater percentage of male bears during the 2023 season compared to previous seasons (Table 1). The density of bear harvest in 2023 (~3 bears/100 mi²) was similar to recent seasons in both the Northern and Southern Zones. This suggests that bear population densities in the Southern Zone have begun to stabilize following population expansions that contributed to peak bear harvest densities throughout the early 2000s (Figure 1).

Table 1. 2023 bear harvest & comparisons

	2023	2022	5-Year Average (2019 - 2023)	10-Year Average (2014-2023)
Northern Zone	485	458	448	474
Early	NA*	NA*	72	142
Bow	15	15	22	32
Muzzleloader	12	8	25	40
Regular	458	434	328	259
Youth	0	1	1	1
% Female : % Male	39% : 61%	41% : 59%	43% : 57%	41% : 59%
Southern Zone	871	860	1,002	1,012
Early	104	234	198	207
Bow	303	348	348	338
Muzzleloader	17	4	13	14
Regular	444	274	437	447
Youth	3	0	6	6
% Female : % Male	38% : 62%	43% : 57%	41% : 59%	41% : 59%
New York State	1,356	1,318	1,450	1,484
Early	104	234	150	349
Bow	318	363	370	369
Muzzleloader	29	12	38	54
Regular	902	708	765	706
Youth	3	1	7	6
% Female : % Male	39% : 61%	42% : 58%	41% : 59%	41% : 59%

*In 2021, DEC simplified the bear hunting seasons in the Adirondack Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) by expanding the regular season to incorporate the early, bow, and muzzleloader season. Bow and muzzleloader season continued in the other Northern Zone WMUs.

Figure 1. Estimated bear harvest densities by zone since 1970



Michael Milillo with the male black bear he took in Hamilton County, Town of Inlet, WMU 5H, during the regular firearms season.



Matthew Stagert with the 320 lb. male black bear he took in Steuben County, Town of Campbell, WMU 8W, during the regular firearms season.

Black Bear Population Management Objectives & Progress

In 2014, DEC established a black bear population management goal for each Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) to help achieve the objectives articulated in DEC's [Management Plan for Black Bears in New York State](#). That same year, DEC initiated an early bear season in certain WMUs located in the southeastern portion of the Southern Zone to reduce high density bear populations (Map 1). Since 2014 DEC has continued to document progress in meeting most of these bear population management goals. However, bears are now established in some WMUs originally defined as "Incompatible for bears", primarily WMUs 3R, 3S, and 4B (Figure 2). DEC is in the process of adapting its management in these areas to foster greater public understanding for how to live responsibly with bears. Please visit www.bearwise.org and see page 14 of this report for more information.

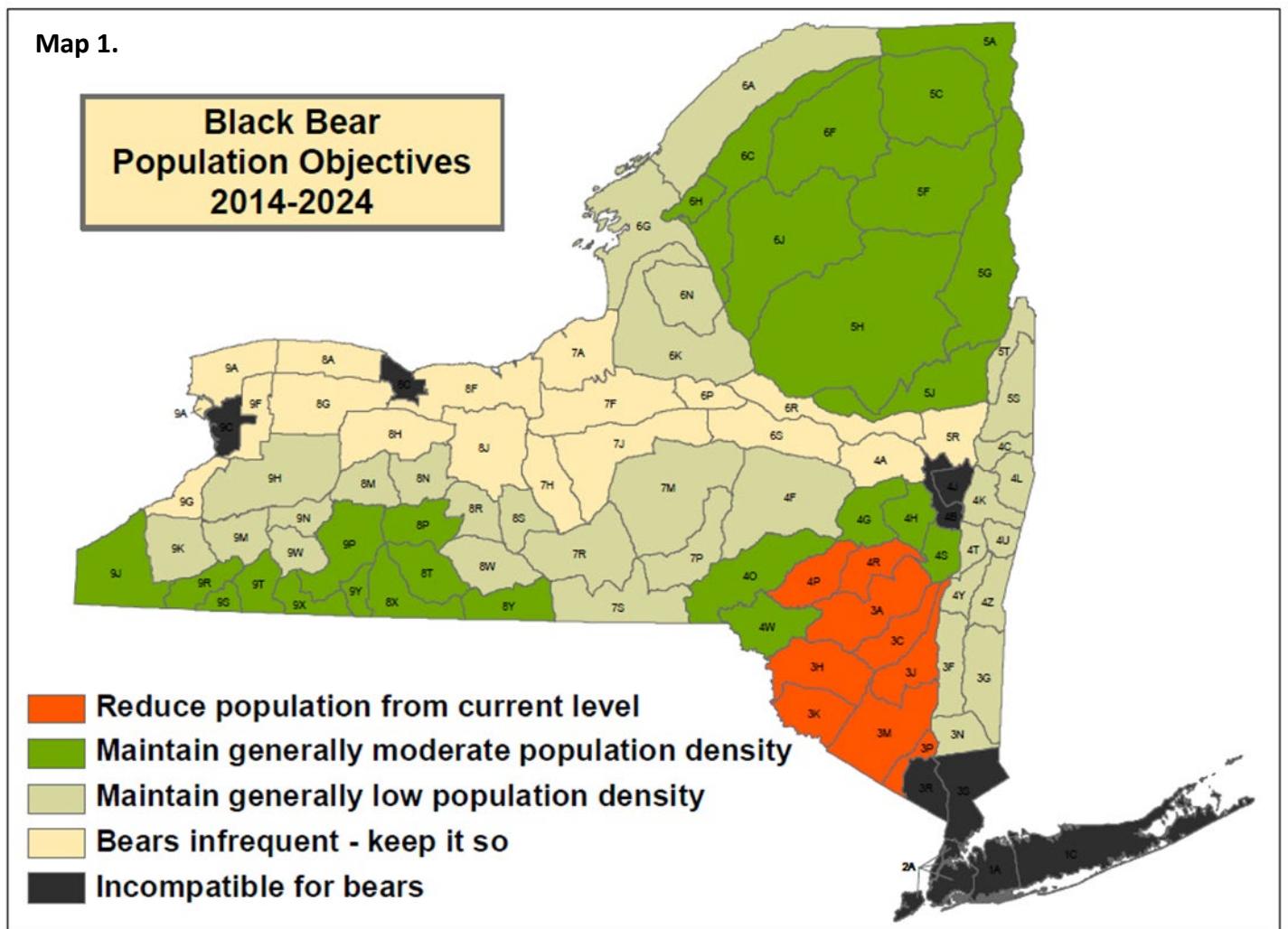
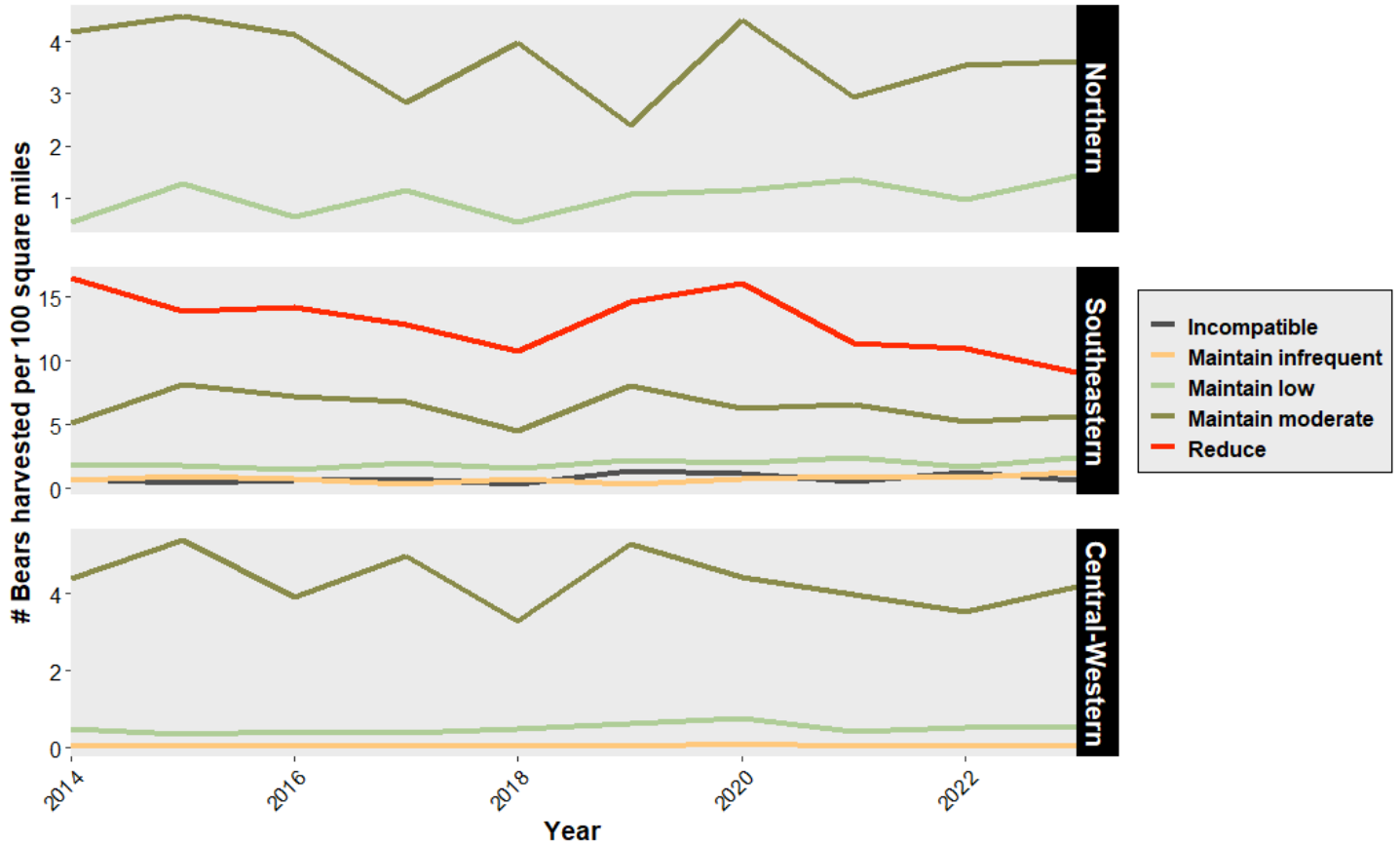


Figure 2. Estimated bear harvest densities by population objective zone since 2014



Andrew Patti with the 166 lb. male black bear he took in Greene County, Town of Cairo, WMU 4H during bow season.

Black Bear Harvest Trends by Wildlife Management Unit (WMU)

Hunters harvested black bears from 73 of 88 WMUs currently open to bear hunting during the 2023 big game hunting seasons. Bear harvest densities were greatest in the WMUs encompassing the Catskills, with just over 16 bears taken per 100 square miles in WMU 3K (Map 2). Bear harvest densities remained relatively stable for most Northern Zone WMUs, with the highest harvest densities documented in WMUs 6C and 6H. Northern Zone bear hunters should note the increasing trend in bear harvest density occurring in WMU 6N (Figure 3). In the Southern Zone, bear harvest densities remained the highest in Southeastern WMUs 3K, 4R, 3C, 4W, 3A, and 3C, and in Central-Western WMUs 9S, 9R, 8X, and 8Y (Figures 4 & 5).

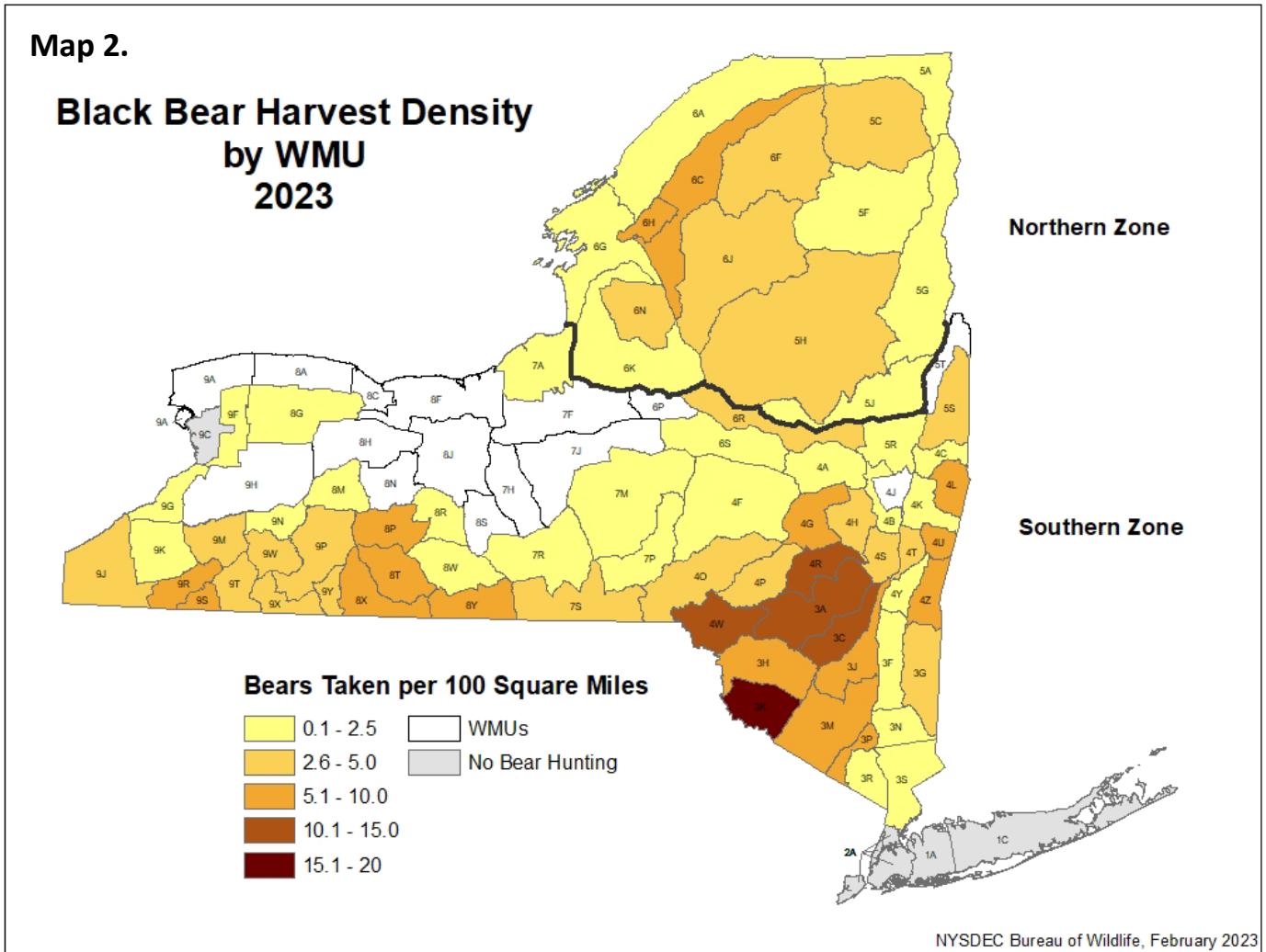
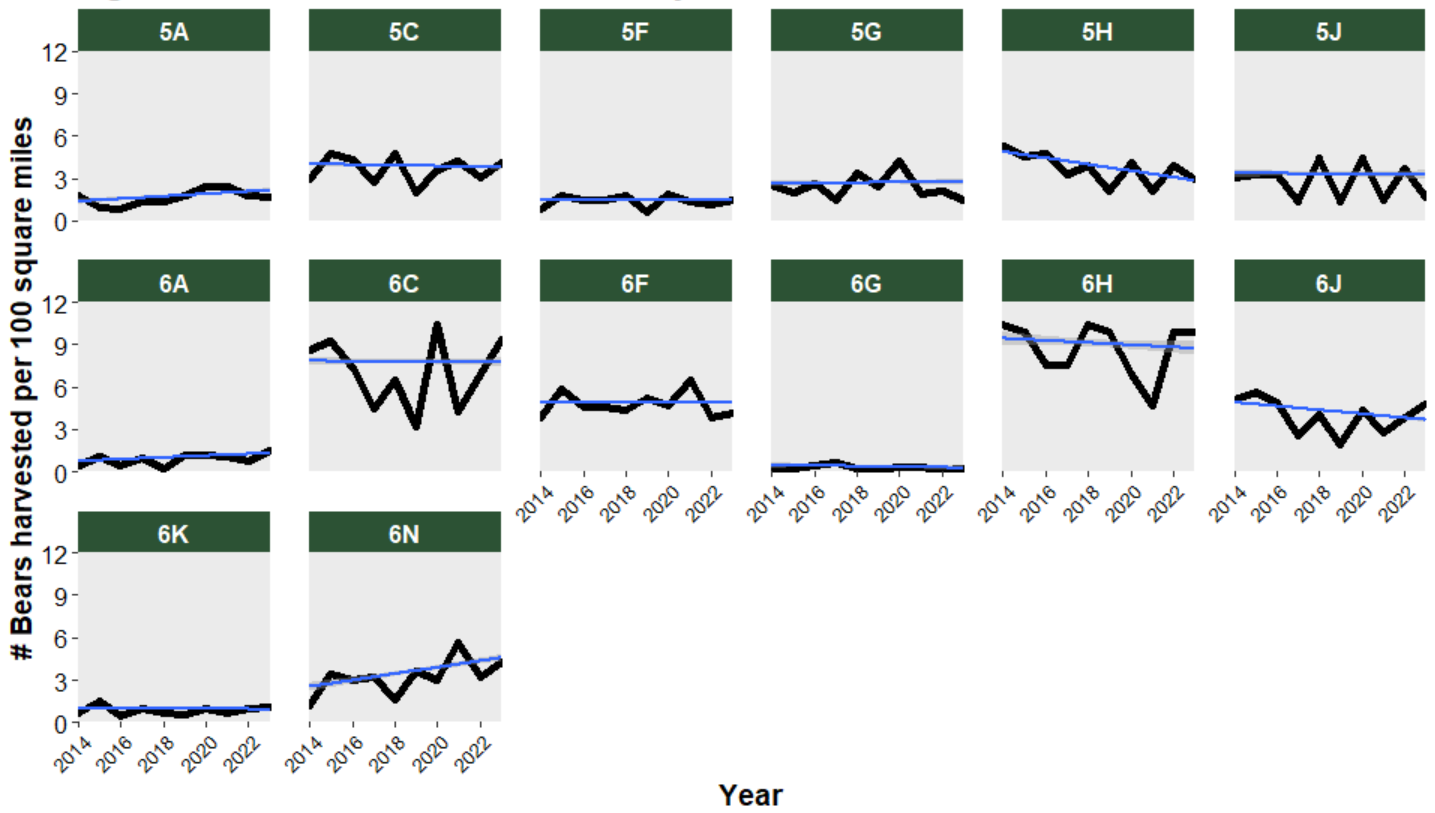


Figure 3. Estimated bear harvest density trends in Northern Zone WMUs since 2014



Jake Hooper with the female black bear he took in Essex County, Town of Wilmington, WMU 5C, during the regular firearms season.

Figure 4. Estimated bear harvest density trends in Southeastern WMUs since 2014

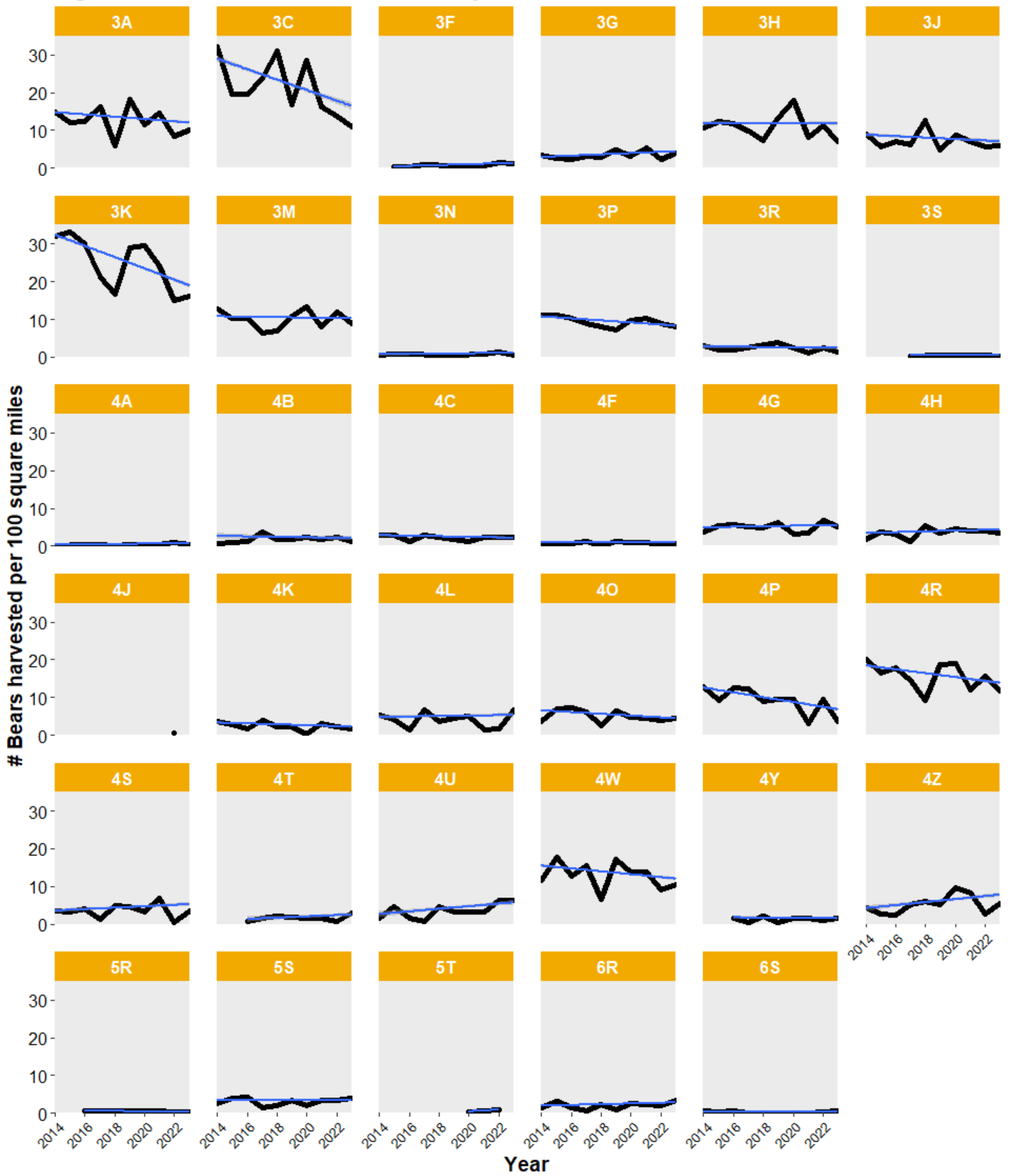
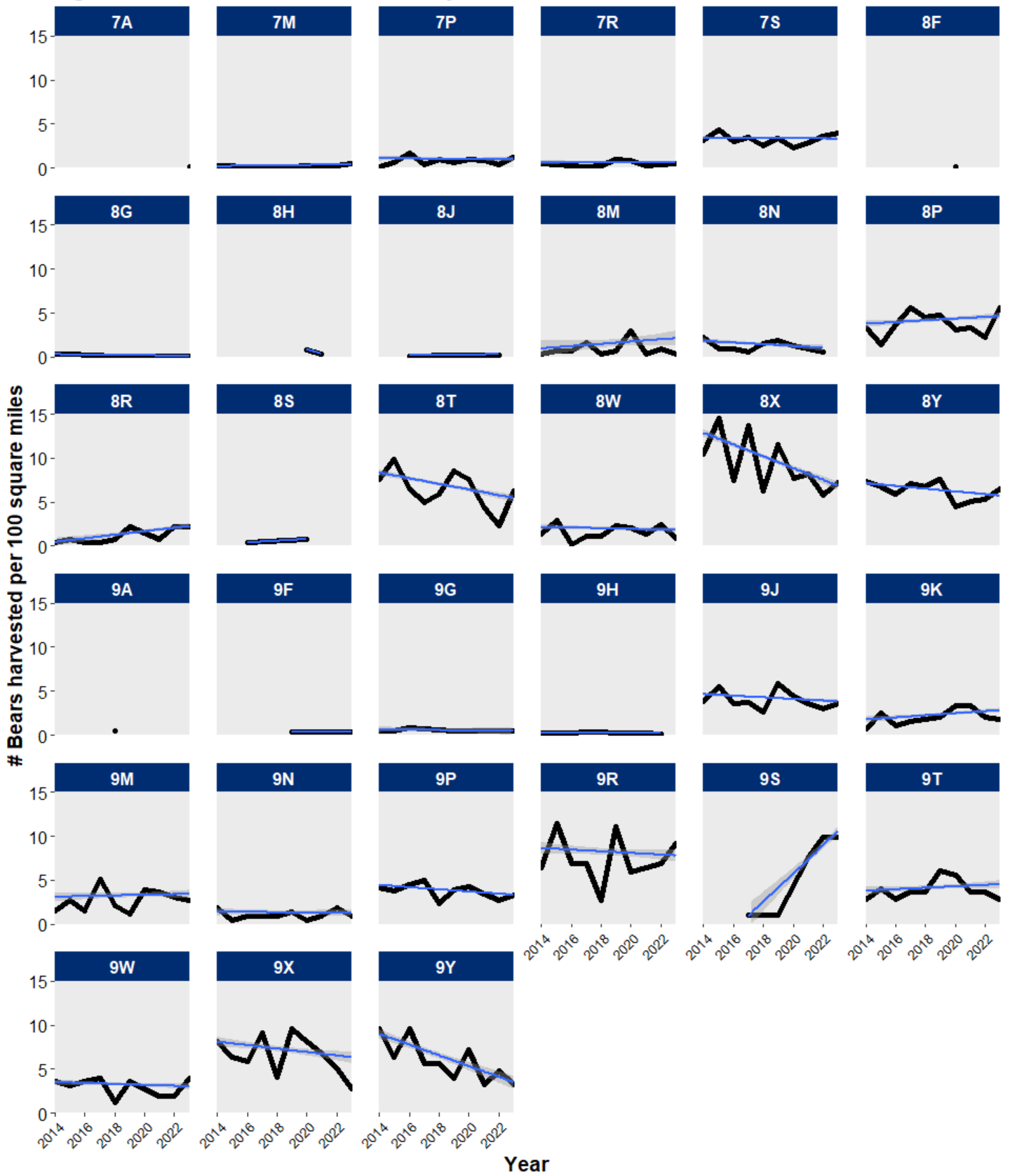


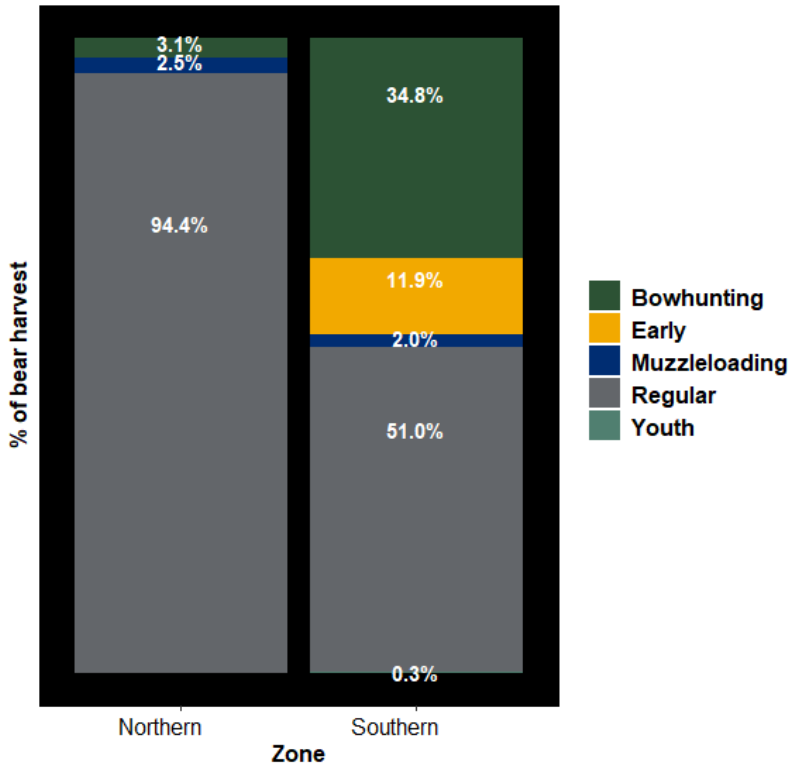
Figure 5. Estimated bear harvest density trends in Central-Western WMUs since 2014



Black Bear Harvest by Season and Day

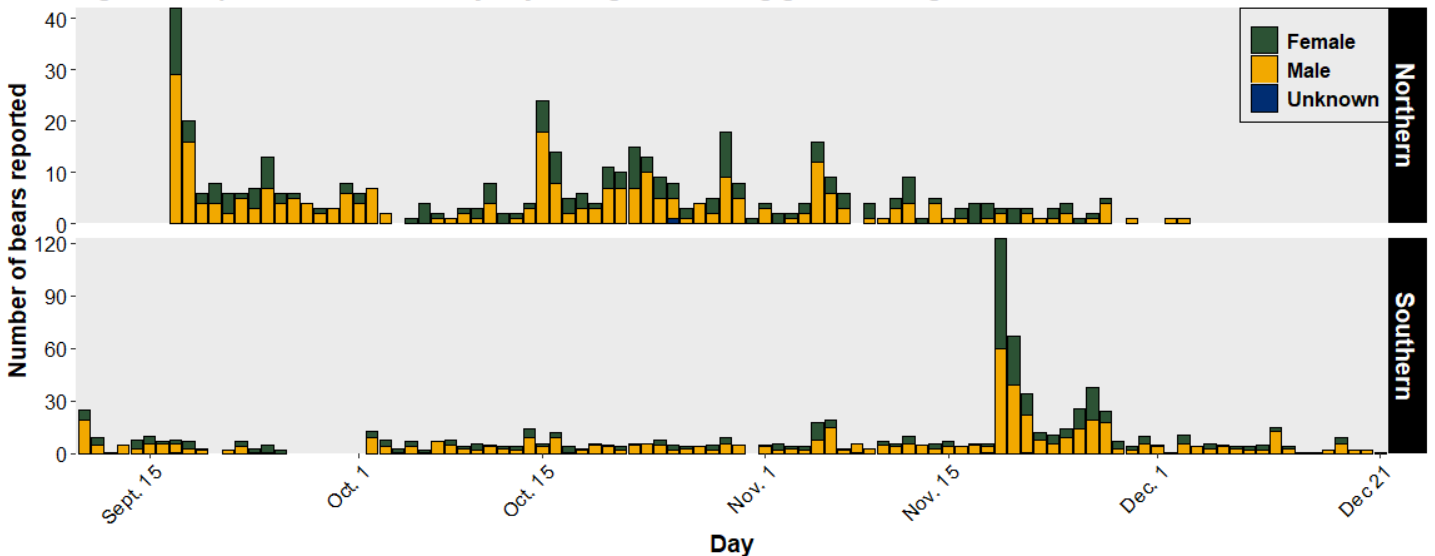
In the Northern Zone, the greatest percentage of the black bear harvest occurred during the regular season, particularly during opening week of the regular bear season which began on September 16th and throughout the first two weeks of the regular deer season which began on October 21st. In the Southern Zone, the greatest percentage of the bear harvest occurred during the regular and bowhunting seasons, particularly during opening week of the regular deer season which began on November 18th (Figures 6 & 7). This indicates that most bears are harvested opportunistically by deer hunters.

Figure 6. Percent of 2023 bear harvest by season



Vinny Mauceri with the 126 lb. male black bear he took in Greene County, Town of Ashland, WMU 4R during the regular firearms season.

Figure 7. Reported bear harvest by day during the 2023 big game hunting seasons



Weights & Ages of Harvested Black Bears

Scaled weights of field dressed black bears were submitted for 21% of the bears reported by hunters or that were checked by cooperating taxidermists and DEC biologists in 2023. The heaviest reported bear weighed 550 lbs. and was taken in WMU 7S. However, both the Northern and Southern Zones produced male bears in excess of 300 lbs. (Table 2 & Figure 8). Weights of female bears tend to peak by the age of five at around 175 lbs. in both the Northern and Southern Zones. Weights of male bears tend to continue to increase with age, but male bears in the Southern Zone tend to achieve heavier weights at a younger age than male bears in the Northern Zone (Figure 9). This is due to variation in habitat productivity, growing season length, and food availability between the Northern and Southern Zones. Bear ages are determined by examining cross-sections of a premolar tooth submitted by hunters and cooperating taxidermists. Bear teeth from the 2023 season are still being analyzed.

Table 2. Heaviest reported bears - 2023

Rank	Dressed Weight (lbs.)	Sex	Season	County	Town	WMU
1	550	Male	Regular	Broome	Windsor	7S
2	485	Male	Bowhunting	St Lawrence	Waddington	6A
3	484	Male	Bowhunting	Orange	New Windsor	3M
4	420	Male	Regular	Schoharie	Middleburgh	4G
5	415	Male	Regular	St Lawrence	Macomb	6A
6	413	Male	Bowhunting	Fulton	Oppenheim	6R
7	400	Male	Regular	Warren	Johnsburg	5H
8	395	Male	Regular	Jefferson	Antwerp	6A
9	392	Male	Regular	Clinton	Altona	5C
10	390	Male	Regular	Orange	Woodbury	3M

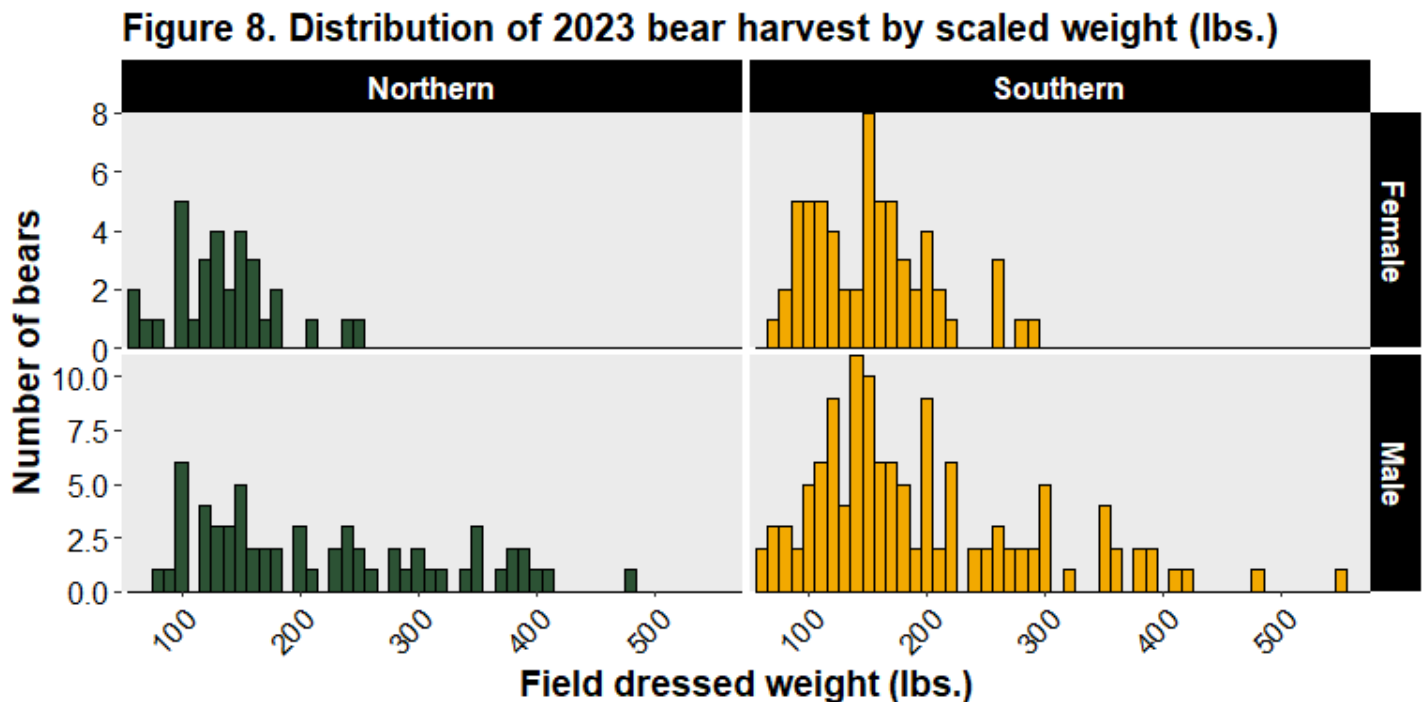
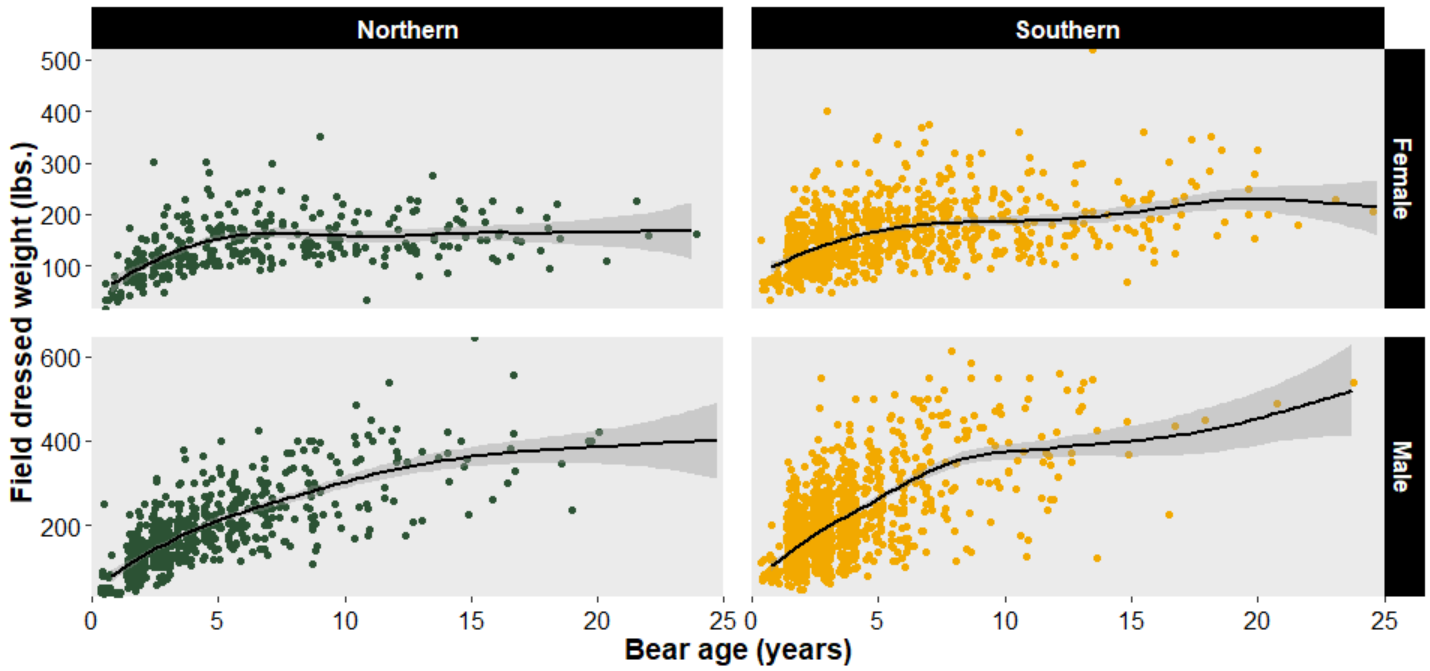


Figure 9. Scaled weights (lbs.) of reported bears by age and sex (2014 - 2022)

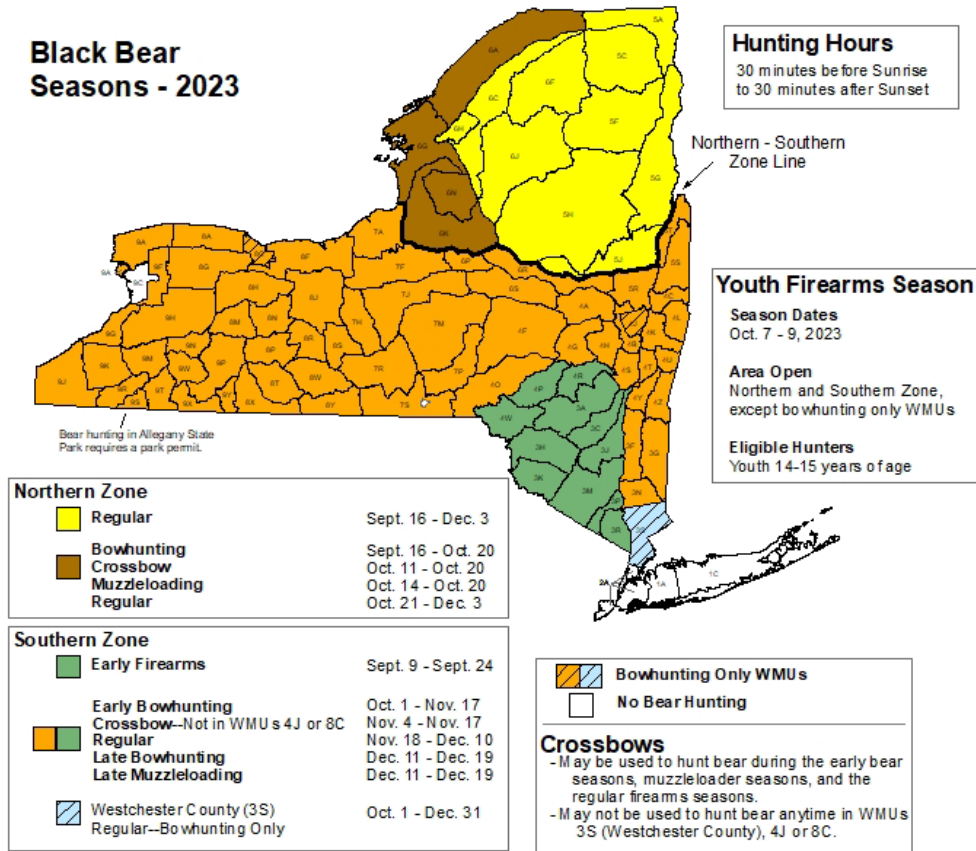


Kyle Franceschini with the 240 lb. male black bear he took in Delaware County, Town of Franklin, WMU 40, during bow season.

2023 Black Bear Hunting Seasons & Legal Implements

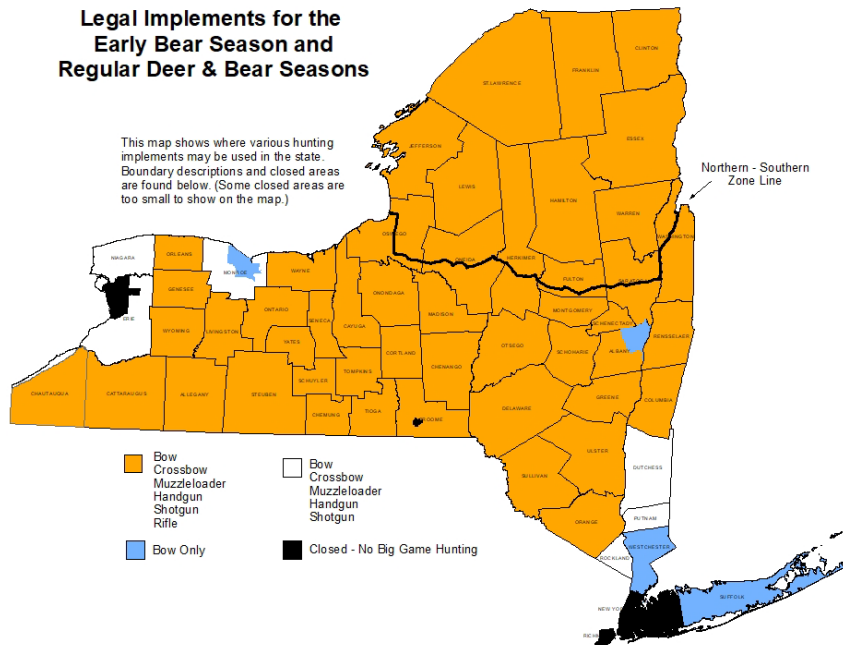
Please see DEC's [2023 Hunting & Trapping Regulations Guide](#) for more information on the 2023 black bear hunting seasons and regulations (Map 3 & 4).

Map 3.



Map 4.

Legal Implements for the Early Bear Season and Regular Deer & Bear Seasons



Black Bear Management Cooperator Program

DEC relies on hunters to collect critical data that DEC uses for black bear management. Successful hunters are required by law to report their bear harvest, but many hunters also voluntarily submit premolar teeth from the bears, which are then used to determine the bear's age (Figure 10). DEC uses this information to assess the impact of harvest on the bear population through analysis of the average age of harvested bears. Additionally, by recording age and sex of harvested bears over a period of years, biologists can more accurately model bear population size. Hunters who **report their bear** and **submit a tooth** become a **NYS Black Bear Management Cooperator** and receive a commemorative patch.

Black Bear Management Cooperator Patches 2006 - 2023



Figure 10. Portion of bear skull showing upper and lower premolar teeth, immediately behind the large canines.

Become BearWise

The BearWise educational campaign was developed by bear biologists and is supported by state wildlife agencies to promote the delivery of standardized messaging to the public on how to live responsibly with black bears. DEC is a cooperating state wildlife agency of the BearWise campaign and has a variety of education and outreach materials available to groups interested in promoting the BearWise campaign in their communities. Please visit www.bearwise.org for more information.





BearWise Outdoor Safety

Black bears are seldom aggressive and rarely injure people. Follow these BearWise tips to avoid encounters.

Hiking

- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Try not to hike alone.
- Keep kids within sight and close by.
- Make noise periodically so bears can avoid you.
- Stay alert; music and phones are distracting.
- Keep dogs leashed at all times or leave them at home. Letting dogs chase or bark at bears is asking for trouble. Don't force a bear to defend itself.
- Double bag your food and pack out all food and trash. Leaving scraps, wrappers or "harmless" items like apple cores teaches bears to associate trails and campsites with food.

Camping

- Do not store food, trash, clothes worn when cooking, or toiletries in your tent. Store these items in approved bear-resistant containers OR out of sight in a locked vehicle OR suspended at least 10 feet above the ground and 10 feet from any part of the tree. Local storage regulations vary. Know before you go.
- Keep a clean camp.
- Don't burn food scraps or trash in your fire ring or grill.
- Cook downwind and as far from your tent as possible.
- Set up backcountry camps away from dense cover and natural food sources.

BearWise.org  more tips >

Fishing & Hunting

- You are more likely to encounter bears when moving quietly and traveling early and late day when bears are most active.
- Follow tips for hiking and camping safely.
- Carcasses, gut piles and bait will attract bears.
- If a bear beats you to your catch or kill, don't try to reclaim it; leave the area when it is safe to do so.

Carry Bear Spray & Know How To Use It

Keep bear spray accessible at all times. Bear spray is proven to be the easiest and most effective way to deter a bear that threatens you. Bear spray doesn't work like bug repellent, so never spray your tent, campsite or belongings.

If You Encounter a Black Bear

If you see a bear before it notices you, don't approach. Stand still, enjoy the moment, then quietly move away. If a bear sees you, back away slowly. Never run; running may trigger a chase response. If a bear approaches, hold your ground, wave your arms and yell "Hey Bear" until it leaves. Always stay with your group. If the bear keeps approaching, use bear spray. If a black bear makes contact with you, do NOT play dead; fight back aggressively.

Black bears come in many colors, from brown, cinnamon, tan or blonde to black. Black bear is a species that lives in most states and across Canada.

 Helping People Live Responsibly with Black Bears
BearWise.org

BearWise® CREATED BY BEAR BIOLOGISTS, SUPPORTED BY STATE WILDLIFE AGENCIES © 2011

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