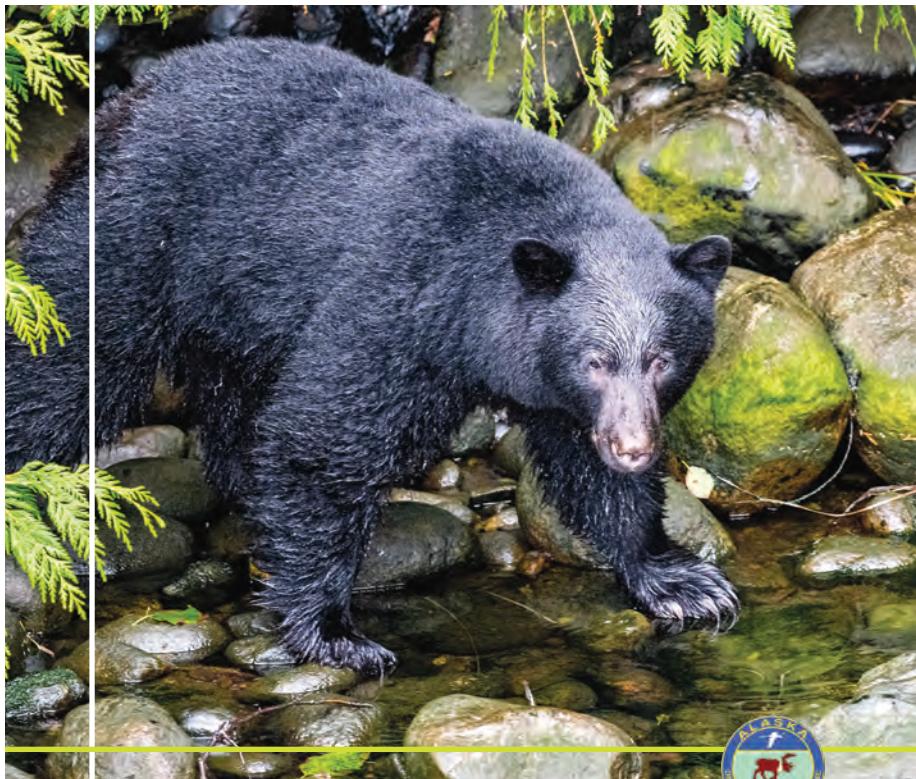


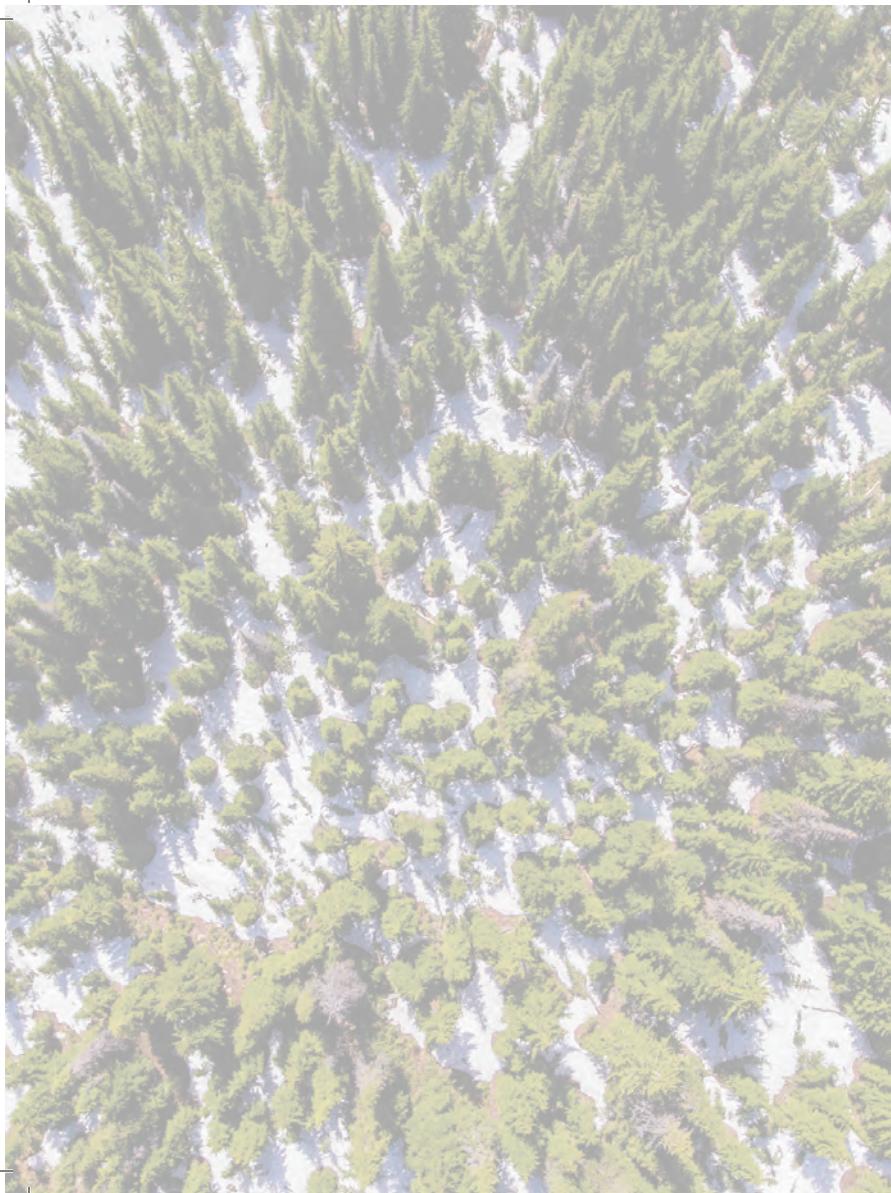
# HUNTING BLACK BEARS

## in Coastal Alaska, Units 1-6



ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME





## A note to readers

The information in this booklet will help you prepare for a black bear hunting trip in coastal Alaska. It is also important to read the statewide hunting regulations. If you do not have a copy, go online or contact a local Alaska Department of Fish and Game office.

**Thank you**



**Alaska Department of Fish & Game**  
P.O. Box 115526  
1255 W. 8th Street  
Juneau, AK 99811-5526

Cover: Sergey Pesterev, courtesy of Unsplash  
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# Begin with the basics

## START ONLINE – [hunt.alaska.gov](http://hunt.alaska.gov)

Stay educated about Alaska's wildlife resources. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game website has a wealth of **valuable information for hunters at [hunt.alaska.gov](http://hunt.alaska.gov).** This site is updated frequently with information ranging from regulation changes, to advice for planning a successful and enjoyable hunt.

For more information on Alaska's bear species, go online to: [alaskabears.alaska.gov](http://alaskabears.alaska.gov).

## STILL HAVE QUESTIONS? CONTACT US.

### Cordova office:

401 Railroad Avenue  
Cordova, AK 99574-0669  
P: (907) 424-3215

### Ketchikan office:

2030 Sealevel Drive, Ste 205  
Ketchikan, AK 99901-6073  
P: (907) 225-2475

### Douglas office:

802 3rd Street (1st Floor)  
Douglas, AK 99824-5412  
P: (907) 465-4265

### Petersburg office:

16 Sing Lee Alley  
Petersburg, AK 99833-0667  
P: (907) 772-3801

### Haines office:

Mile 1 Haines Highway  
Haines, AK 99827-0330  
P: (907) 766-3638

### Sitka office:

304 Lake Street, Room 103  
Sitka, AK 99835-7671  
P: (907) 747-5449

# Black bears in Alaska

## DISTRIBUTION

Black bears (*Ursus americanus*) are the most abundant and widely distributed of the three species of North American bears (the other species being brown/grizzly bears and polar bears).

Black bears occur over most of the forested areas of Alaska. They are not found on the Seward Peninsula, on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Alaska

Peninsula beyond Lake

Iliamna or north of the Brooks Range. They are also absent from some of the large Gulf of Alaska islands, notably Kodiak, Montague, Hinchinbrook and others.

In coastal Alaska, black bears occupy most islands with the exceptions of Admiralty, Baranof, Chichagof, and Kruzof, which are inhabited only by brown bears. Both species occur on the southeastern mainland. While black bears are most often associated with forests, depending on the season, they range from sea level habitats to alpine areas.

## GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Black bears are the smallest of the North American bears. A typical adult bear might stand 30 inches at the shoulders and measure 60 inches from nose to tail. Males are larger than females.



BEN OWEN | UNSPLASH

Black bears, like the ones pictured, are the smallest of the North American bears. A typical adult black bear might stand 30 inches at the shoulders and measure 60 inches from nose to tail. Males are larger than females.

## BLACK BEARS IN ALASKA

An average adult male in spring weighs about 180 to 200 pounds, with the larger males weighing up to 350 pounds. Bears are considerably lighter when they emerge from winter dormancy and may be 20 percent heavier in the fall after a season of foraging.

Coat color of black bears can vary. Three colors are common in Alaska — black coat color is most common, but brown or cinnamon bears are often seen in the southcentral and southeastern mainland areas. The rare blue (glacier) coat color can occur on the mainland from Ketchikan northward and is most common near Yakutat. Bears with a black coat color are primarily found on the islands of Southeast Alaska. It is common for black bears to have a patch of white hair on the fronts of their chests.

Black bears are most easily distinguished in the field from brown



COURTESY OF LISA PARSONS

Coat color of black bears can vary. Three colors are common in Alaska — black coat color is most common, but brown or cinnamon bears are often seen, as well.

bears by their straight facial profile and the lack of a pronounced shoulder hump. Like most bear species, black bears have good senses of sight and hearing. They also have an outstanding sense of smell; it is approximately seven times better than a bloodhound.

## LIFE HISTORY

Except for sows with cubs, black bears are solitary. Mating takes place from May through July. The fertilized egg will not implant in the uterus of the female until the fall, followed by a six- to eight-week gestation period. One to four cubs may be born; two is most common. Cubs are born in the den nearly hairless and weighing under a pound. Upon emerging from the den in May, they weigh about five pounds and are covered with fine woolly hair. Cubs generally remain with their mothers through the first winter following birth.

Bears are sexually mature at three to six years of age, with variation among different environments. In Southeast Alaska, female bears will breed every other year. However, if the litter is lost early in the first summer, the female may breed again that year. In more marginal environments, such as northern Alaska, black bear cubs may stay with the mother for an extra year, and females will breed every third year.



JOHN HYDE | ADF&G

A pair of black bear cubs take refuge in a tree in Southeast Alaska. Between one to four cubs may be born to a sow, but twins are most common.

## FOOD HABITS & HABITAT

Black bears are creatures of both opportunity and habit when it comes to food. In coastal habitats, spring bears forage on beach greens. However, they will exploit any available source of food. Bears will also readily eat winter-killed animals or prey on newborn moose calves or deer fawns.



COURTESY OF DANIEL BUCKSCOTT

Black bears are true omnivores. Upon emergence from the den, bears seek out freshly-sprouted vegetation. They will also eat winter-killed animals, newborn ungulates and will shift to salmon when available.

As summer progresses, bears are typically found along streams and rivers that support abundant salmon runs. In areas where salmon are not available, they rely primarily on vegetation throughout the year. Berries, especially blueberries, provide an important late summer and early fall food. Clams, mussels and insects are also key components that round out the typical black bear diet.

## WINTER DORMANCY

Black bears enter into a voluntary state of hibernation during winter months. The timing of hibernation varies depending on food availability and climate. Generally, this period begins in the fall, after food becomes hard to find. Emergence happens in spring when food is available again. Occasionally, bears emerge from their dens during winter, especially in periods of mild weather.

While denning, bears sleep for long periods during which their body temperature drops, metabolic rate declines, and they do not

urinate or defecate. Bears may hibernate for six to eight months in coastal Alaska. Lone males are the first to emerge from the den, followed by females without cubs. Females with cubs are the last to emerge in spring.

Black bears den in a variety of habitats — from sea level to alpine areas. Dens are found in everything from rock cavities to hollow trees, from self-made excavations to depressions on open ground.

## DANGER TO HUMANS

Bears are extremely powerful animals and potentially dangerous to humans. They are often cautious and shy but will defend a food cache or cubs if they feel threatened.

As urban development expands in Alaska, black bears are reported more frequently in communities and towns. In Alaska's biggest cities — Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau — bear encounters with humans commonly occur, especially where unsecured attractants, such as garbage, livestock, or pet food, is available. Bears that become conditioned to seeing attractants as a food source are often killed. Once attractants are secured, however, conflicts between bears and people usually decline or end.



STEVE BETHUNE | ADF&G

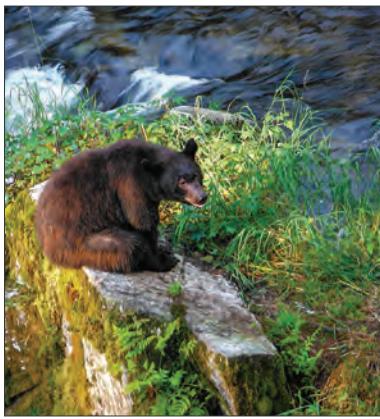
Alaska Department of Fish and Game Biologist Boyd Porter stands at the base of a hemlock tree in March of 2013 — the den site of a collared male black bear. Dens can be found from sea level to alpine areas, and may be located in rock cavities, hollow trees, self-made excavations — even on open ground.

## BLACK BEARS IN ALASKA



COURTESY OF GHOST BEAR PHOTOGRAPHY

Black bears cubs generally stay with the mother for the first year after birth. Female bears will not hesitate to defend their young if they feel threatened.



ADF&G

As summer progresses, black bears will feed on salmon returning to freshwater streams, like this bear on Anan Creek, in Southeast Alaska.

A female bear with cubs should always be treated with caution. Avoid being near or between a mother bear and her young.

Once alerted to the presence of humans, most bears will avoid people by moving away. However, bears have attacked without apparent provocation; these situations are rare.

In general, all bears should be considered potentially dangerous and treated with respect. Black bears that appear unafraid of people should be treated with greater caution.

## Know where to hunt black bears

Black bears are found throughout Southeast and Southcentral Alaska with the exception of Game Management Unit 4 (Admiralty, Baranof and Chichagof islands), where there are only brown/grizzly bears. Hunters should research the unit or subunit they plan to hunt, and study the terrain and geography of the area.

Maps are included in the hunting regulations booklet, published annually, with pertinent information for each unit and subunit. For the most up-to-date information, always check the most recent regulations booklet, the ADF&G website or contact a local ADF&G office.



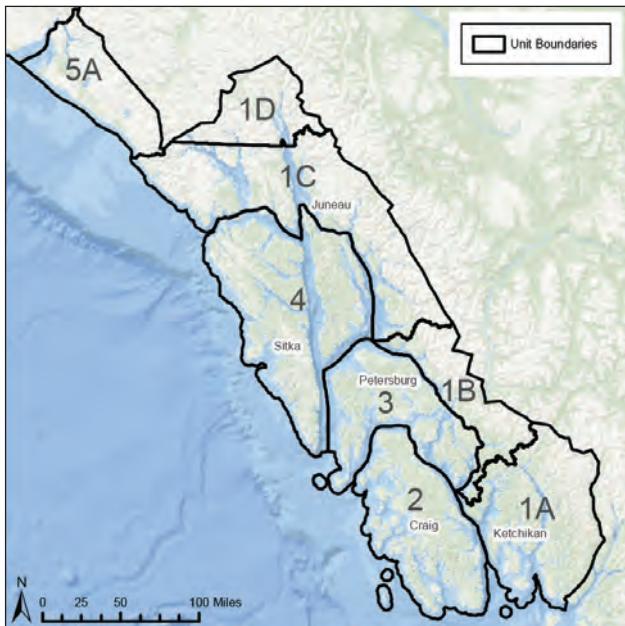
JOHN HYDE | ADF&G

Black bears, like the one pictured in the Tongass National Forest in June, can often be found grazing on sedges in estuaries or along coastlines.

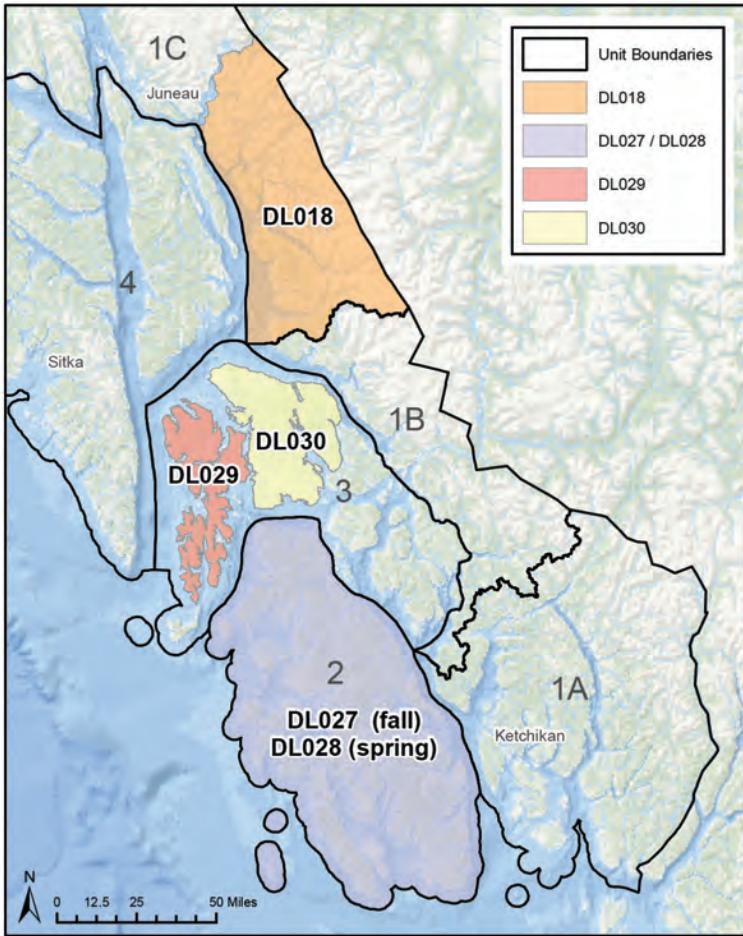
## Black bear hunt maps

In certain portions of Southeast Alaska with high harvest rates, additional requirements are placed on nonresident hunters. In these areas, nonresidents must either hunt with a guide (either Alaska-licensed or resident relative) after obtaining black bear harvest tickets, or hunt without a guide, after obtaining a drawing permit through a lottery process. The following maps illustrate boundaries for Game Management Units 1-6, as well as registration and drawing permit hunt areas. See pg. 14 for more on drawing permits.

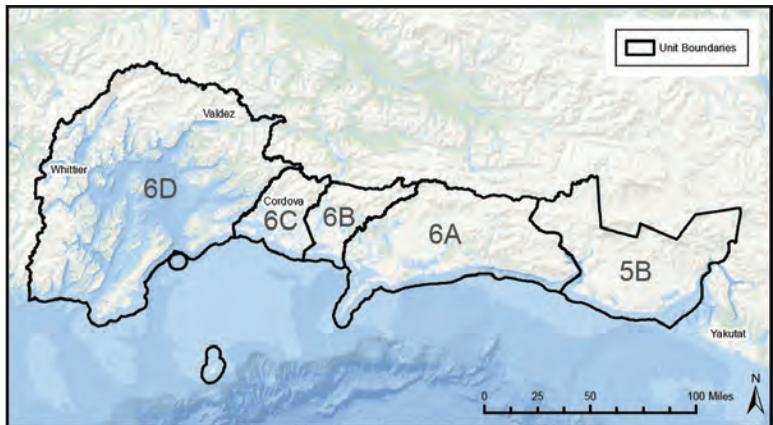
### Units 1-5A Area Boundaries



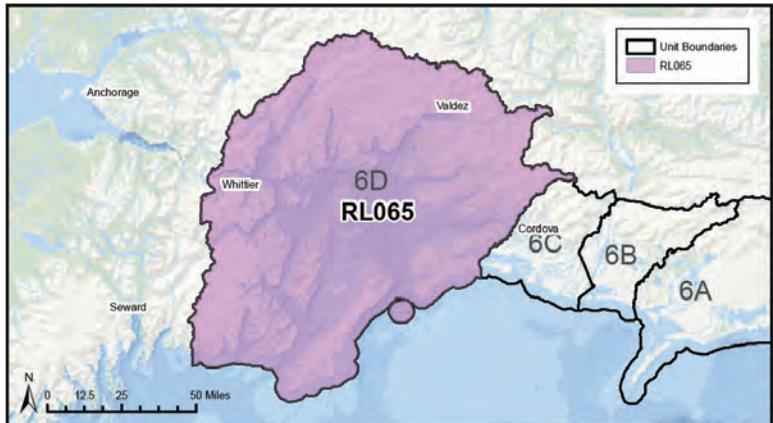
## Draw Hunts – Units 1-3



## Unit 5B-6 Area Boundaries



## Unit 6 Registration Hunt



## Coastal Alaska black bear hunting

### UNITS 1-6 – LICENSES, PERMITS & OTHER REQUIREMENTS

#### Resident hunter requirements:

- Harvest ticket
- Permit if hunting in 6D-RL065 (see map pg. 12)
- Hunting license (18 or older)

#### Nonresident requirements:

Beginning July 1, 2020, requirements for nonresidents hunting black bear in Units 1-3, and 5-6 will vary by hunt location. There is no hunting season for black bears in Unit 4.

- All nonresident hunters must have a valid Alaska hunting license (\$160).
- Most nonresidents will need to obtain a metal locking-tag for black bear (\$450). However, hunters holding a special nonresident military hunting license do not need to obtain a locking-tag for black bear.

#### Unit 1C, South; Unit 2, Prince of Wales; Unit 3, Kupreanof and Kuiu islands:

Nonresidents may hunt with a guide — either an Alaska-licensed professional guide, or a resident relative acting as a guide — after obtaining a black bear harvest ticket. A nonresident not hunting with a guide or resident relative will need to apply for and win a draw permit, which is obtained through a lottery process.

## Remainder of Units 1-5:

Guided and unguided nonresidents hunting in the general season harvest areas may hunt with a license and harvest ticket. Neither a drawing permit nor a registered guide is required to hunt in the general season black bear hunt.

## Unit 6:

- Both resident and nonresident hunters planning to hunt in Unit 6D must have a registration permit (see map pg. 12).
- There are no special rules regarding nonresident hunters in Unit 6.

## Youth under age 10:

- A hunter under age 10 may only hunt black bears under the direct and immediate supervision of a licensed adult. The youth's take counts under the supervising adult's bag limit.
- Nonresident youth must have a hunting license and locking-tag.

## DRAWING PERMITS

ADF&G awards drawing permits by lottery. These hunts require significant pre-planning, with some hunts happening nine to 18

Black bears are creatures of both opportunity and habit when it comes to food. In coastal habitats, spring bears often forage on beach greens.



PAUL SAHOTA |  
ADOBE STOCK

months later. Each fall, ADF&G publishes an **Alaska Drawing Hunt Supplement** with information on drawing hunt opportunities. Applications must be submitted during the annual application period which opens in early November and closes in mid-December. There is a fee to apply. Lottery results are announced in February and permits are distributed the following summer. **For more information and to apply for a drawing permit go online to: [hunt.alaska.gov](http://hunt.alaska.gov).**

All black bear hunters are required to file a hunt report, including those who did not hunt or were unsuccessful.

## **SEASONS AND BAG LIMITS**

Generally, black bear hunting season in Units 1-6 begins Sept. 1 and runs through June 30. For bag limits and exact season dates, consult the hunting regulations for the area you intend to hunt. In Units 1-5, bears wounded but not recovered by a hunter, count against the bag limit for the regulatory year.

## **SEALING REQUIREMENTS**

All black bears harvested in coastal Alaska must be sealed within 30 days of the kill. Additionally, all black bear hunters are required to file a hunt report, including those who did not hunt or were unsuccessful. Make sure to check the reporting requirements for the area to be hunted. To have a bear sealed, bring the unfrozen hide and skinned out skull to an ADF&G office or an appointed sealing agent. Sealing information helps ensure black bear populations are managed sustainably.

## Incorporate sealing requirements into the hunt plan.

- Plan the hunt and travel schedule to accommodate sealing of a harvested black bear. If unable to bring the harvested bear to an ADF&G office to be sealed, contact the nearest ADF&G office for additional sealing options.
- **The skull** must be skinned out (completely removed from the hide) and unfrozen before being presented for sealing.
- **The hide**, when required, must be presented for sealing unfrozen with the claws and evidence of sex naturally attached. The locking-tag should be placed through evidence of sex on the bear hide at the kill site.
- During the sealing process a **signature will be required from the hunter on the sealing certificate**. When a hunter can't be present during the sealing process, a temporary sealing certificate, available from ADF&G, can be used. This allows another person to bring the bear, plus the completed and signed temporary certificate, in to be sealed within the required time.
- A small tooth (premolar) will be pulled to determine the age of the bear. This can only be done effectively on an unfrozen skull (see second bullet point on "skull").
- Black bear trophies may not be sold. See hunting regulations for further details.

## MEAT SALVAGE

During the spring season (Jan. 1- May 31), hunters are required to salvage all edible meat of black bears harvested in Alaska. Edible meat of black bears includes meat of the front quarters as far as the knee (distal joint of the radius-ulna), hindquarters as far as the hock (distal joint of the tibia-fibula), and that portion of the animal along the backbone between the front and hindquarters (back straps and tenderloins).

Failure to properly salvage all of the required meat of a big game animal is charged as a Class A Misdemeanor offense. During the spring season, failure to salvage all of the edible meat may result in a charge of “wanton waste” which carries a maximum fine of \$10,000, a maximum jail sentence of up to one year, and a potential loss of hunting privileges in the future.

**It is illegal to shoot cubs or a female bear accompanied by cubs. Always watch bears long enough to ensure no cubs are present.**



**ADORE STOCK**

Make sure to watch the bear carefully to ensure it is legal to harvest. Females, like the one pictured, are not legal if accompanied by cubs.

## Preparing for a successful hunt

### SPRING VS. FALL HUNTS

#### Spring hunts

The peak of coastal Alaska's spring bear season typically extends from the last week of April through the month of May. However, farther north the peak season for bears is pushed progressively later. The timing of the peak season for black bears can vary depending on winter severity, which may shift the timing of vegetative green-up a few weeks earlier or later.

As bears forage on low-elevation grasses and sedges, hunters often spot them from boats and then stalk the bear on foot. The pelts of spring black bears are highly sought after if taken before they start to rub during the summer. (See pg. 32-33 on hide care.)

The first bears are normally taken in mid to late April. In general, the later in the spring you hunt, the more bears there will be out of the dens. Hunters should look bears over closely no matter when they hunt, as some bears emerge from dens badly rubbed, decreasing the quality of the hide. Others don't rub until late May or even June. Any bear showing partial brown coloration is probably rubbed.

On Prince of Wales Island and the surrounding archipelago (Unit 2) the peak of the spring harvest generally occurs May 1-10. Like other areas of the southeast region, timing is closely tied to spring green-up. Cinnamon colored black bears are rare in this area. There are no brown/grizzly bears in Unit 2. Compared to Prince of Wales, seasonal spring warming conditions for Ketchikan and the mainland areas in Unit 1A, 1B and 1C tend to occur later.

Unit 3 includes Kuiu, Kupreanof, Mitkof islands and the surrounding archipelago. This is the second largest black bear producing unit in Southeast. Kuiu and Kupreanof islands, combined, account for approximately 90 percent of the Unit 3 annual harvest.

### Bear baiting

Bear bait stations may be established in certain areas and is a hunting method used by some hunters in spring. All bait stations must be registered with ADF&G and all persons who wish to register a bait site must have successfully completed an ADF&G-approved bear baiting clinic. Hunters who utilize legal bait stations find this method allows for a more selective black bear harvest.

Bear baiting may be prohibited in local areas. Always check the regulations for the planned hunt area.



Spring hunting for black bears can offer opportunities for high quality hides. However, fall hunts can provide opportunities for larger bears.

COURTESY OF ARNIE HANGER

## HUNTING BLACK BEARS

Bait stations may be registered in person at an ADF&G office beginning 15 days prior to the start of the season. Bait may not be placed at the site until the season is open.

### To register a bait station, hunters must:

- Be at least 18 years old.
- Have successfully completed an ADF&G-approved bear baiting clinic.
- Provide ADF&G with a specific description of the location where the bait will be placed.
- Have a posted sign clearly identifying the site as a “Bear Bait Station,” which also displays the bear bait permit number assigned by ADF&G, the hunter’s hunting license number, as well as the hunting license numbers of others who hunt over that bait station.

Bear baiting regulations may change from year to year. Always check the most up-to-date regulations for the planned hunt area.

### Fall hunts

Approximately 25 percent of the annual harvest takes place during the fall season in Southeast Alaska. In this region of Alaska, the fall black bear harvest typically peaks during the first two weeks of the season (early September) and declines as the season progresses.

Hides taken in early fall (September to mid-October) are generally not as dense or as long-haired as those of early-spring bears. Bears begin to den in mid-October and very few remain out by mid-November. Those that remain are usually found along late-run salmon streams.



ADobe stock

In coastal Alaska, spring green-up happens first along shorelines, before moving inland as snowpack begins to melt. Bears will often be found foraging on grasses and sedges in these zones.

## HUNTING CONDITIONS

During the spring season, hunters typically concentrate their hunting activities along the shoreline and stream mouths where grasses and sedges are most abundant. Green vegetation is usually most abundant along the shoreline in early spring and green-up moves inland and upward in elevation as spring progresses.

Fall bear hunts are somewhat more challenging than spring hunts and are primarily conducted along productive salmon streams where fall bears often congregate to feed on salmon. Hunters also find fall bears in recently logged areas of the forest where they feed on berries.

The early morning and late evening hours are the best times to hunt bears, however, during the fall bears can be out and about at all

hours. Be particularly mindful of wind direction. On streams the wind typically flows downstream in the early morning and late evening and upstream during the mid-day as temperatures increase.

## JUDGING SEX AND SIZE OF BEARS

### Avoid killing females

The most important factor in maintaining a stable population of bears is minimizing the take of females. Make sure to accurately identify the sex and size of the bear before shooting. Focusing the harvest on mature males will allow for the best long-term quality hunt opportunities. Watch bears long enough to ensure no cubs are present. Cubs may wander away from their mother or be obscured from view by thick vegetation, particularly during the fall season. It is illegal to shoot cubs or females accompanied by cubs. Fall is also a time when bears of both sexes are less segregated and have gained fat over the course of the summer. This can make judging the

sex of a bear more difficult.



ADOBESTOCK

With the best fall hunting during the first two weeks of the season, black bears can be found fattening up near late-run salmon streams.

### Select large males

If you see a single bear, use the criteria on pages 24 and 25 to gauge whether it is a large male, a female, or a younger bear. Harvesting a large male may require careful evaluation of several



High quality optics are important for judging the sex of a bear and for evaluating hide quality. They can also be important for estimating size of an animal, but be cautious since bears can look deceptively large when viewed through magnification optics.

**ADF&G**

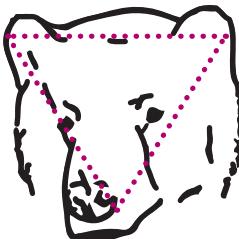
individual bears before a decision is made to shoot. It is common to see several small bears for each medium-sized bear, and several medium-sized bears for each large male.

Binoculars are a must, and spotting scopes can be extremely valuable when judging the size and sex of black bears. Optics are also valuable when evaluating hide quality and looking for rubbed spots on bears. However, black bears can appear deceptively large when viewed through magnifying optics, therefore, it is important to be patient and wait for opportunities to compare individual bears.

## HOW TO IDENTIFY LARGE/MALE BEARS

### CHARACTERISTICS:

- Stocky legs; massive body
- Large rounded head
- Ears appear smaller
- Ears to nose an equilateral triangle
- Slower, more deliberate movements (swagger gait)
- Penis sheath visible



ADORE STOCK

This black bear has many of the characteristics of a male bear. Notice the large, rounded, triangle-shaped head and stocky body.

## HOW TO IDENTIFY SMALL YOUNG BEARS:

### CHARACTERISTICS:

- Appear to be "all legs"
- More streamlined, pointed head
- Head large in proportion to body
- Ears appear closer together
- Ears to nose a skinny triangle

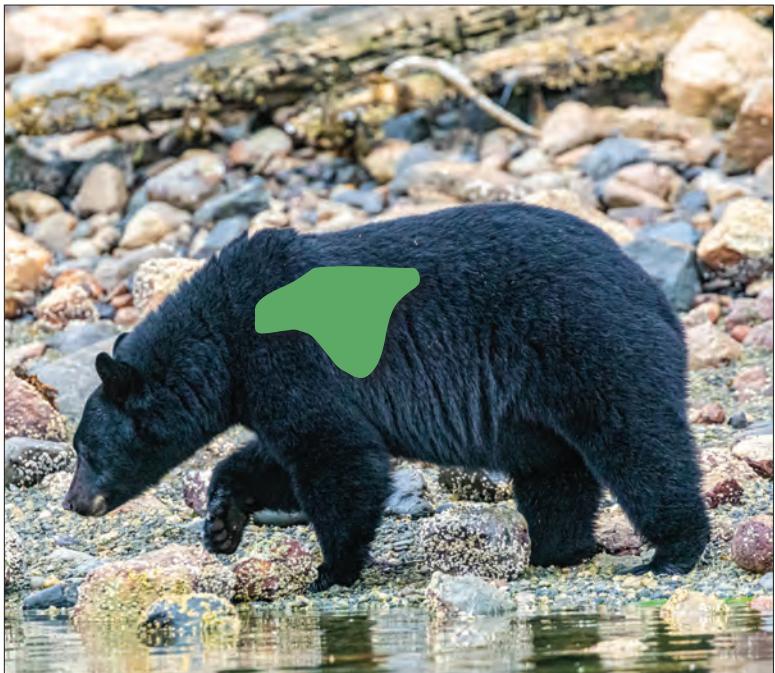


ADOBESTOCK

A young black bear, like this one, appears to be "all legs" and has a streamlined, pointed head.

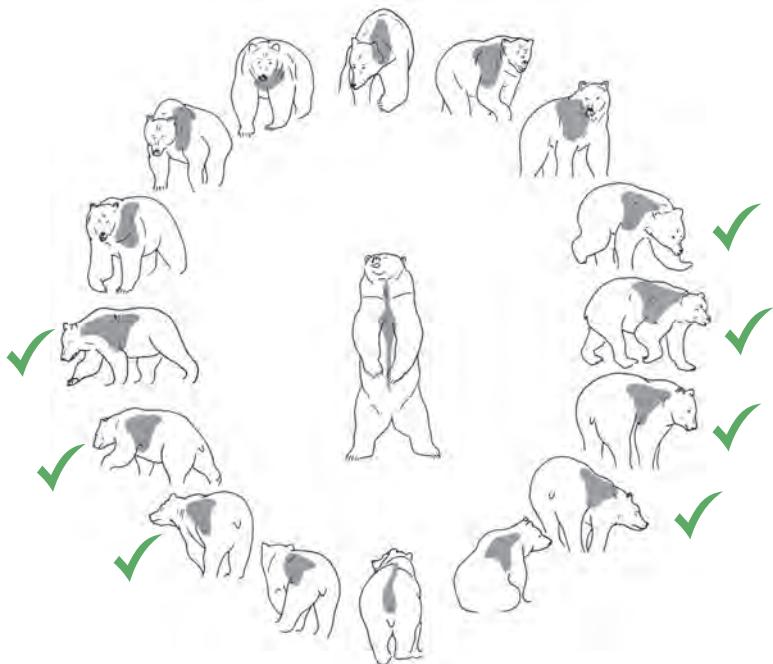
## SHOT PLACEMENT

Opinions of the best shot placement for black bears vary. We recommend a shot broadside and center of the shoulder angled slightly forward so the bullet passes through the heart and lungs and exits through the opposite shoulder. This shot placement has a high likelihood of resulting in a quick, clean kill.



ADobe stock

The shaded green area indicates shot placement on a black bear angled broadside. This placement has a high likelihood of resulting in a quick, clean kill.



GRAPHIC BY ERIK VAN VEENEN

This diagram shows the vital organ area of a bear at different angles to the hunter. While all angles provide some view of the vitals, shots taken at many of these angles would likely result in a wounded animal. Hunters will have a greater likelihood of a quick, clean kill by selecting the types of shots emphasized by those images shown with check-marks.

## Recovering the bear

Bears are leapers, bounders, and runners. It is rare for a bear to drop in place when first struck by a bullet. Upon being hit, most bears will attempt to make it to the nearest available cover. Because of their layers of fat and thick fur, bears seldom bleed excessively even when mortally wounded. Recovering struck bears can therefore be a challenge. Limiting how far bears move after they are hit is the best way to ensure a humane kill and a quick recovery. For these reasons, adequate caliber weapons, proper shooting distance, excellent shot placement and rapid follow-up shots are important.

### Tips for tracking/recovering a wounded bear:

- Wait at least 20 minutes before attempting to track and recover it.
- Follow any visible blood trail carefully. Heavy rains can make tracking difficult.
- Always mark the bear's last known location by looking for a blood trail and signs of broken or disturbed vegetation and scrapes on the ground. (This may require getting down on hands and knees.)
- If no sign is found, follow any prominent game trails along the animals escape route or systematically search in a circular pattern, spiralling out from where the bear or sign was last observed.

Whatever the search method, don't give up if it is likely the bear was hit. Hunters have found dead bears more than 600 yards away from where they were shot without any blood trail.

## PREVENTING WOUNDING LOSS

Successfully managing bear populations requires accurate mortality data. Wounding loss (bears that are struck but not recovered) is one type of mortality that is difficult to track. In Units 1-5, a black bear wounded by a hunter counts against the bag limit for the regulatory year. "Wounded" means there is sign of blood or other indication that the bear has been struck by a bullet or arrow. In Unit 6, this regulation does not apply.

### Proper caliber

To assure a quick and humane kill and to reduce the chances of crippling and loss of a wounded bear, premium bullets are recommended. A well-placed shot with a .30-06 or higher-power weapon is usually adequate for black bears. Regardless of which caliber weapon a hunter elects to use, regular practice will help ensure proper shot placement.

### Proper distance

Black bears are difficult to kill, seldom drop where they are first struck and often require follow-up shots. **Shooting distance should not exceed 100 yards and shots should be taken with the aid of a rest.**



COURTESY OF MATT GUTAKER

In spring, Alison and Matt Gutaker work as a husband and wife team hunting bears. This was the first bear Alison harvested. Proper firearm caliber selection will help ensure a quick, clean kill.

## HUNTING BLACK BEARS

To ensure a clean kill, the hunter should wait for the bear to move into the best alignment for optimal shot placement. Make the first shot the best, then use rapid follow-up shots to prevent the animal from reaching dense cover.

## TRANSPORTING FIREARMS

Restrictions exist on the transportation and possession of personal firearms in Alaska. Make sure to check the latest regulations.

### Canadian laws on declaration and transportation of firearms:

Transporting a firearm to or from Canada requires prior planning. Always check the most up-to-date requirements before traveling with firearms. For more information on transporting firearms through Canada, go online to the Canadian Firearms Centre: <https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/firearms>.



ABBY MCALLISTER | ADF&G

Having a successful hunt begins with research and planning. Many black bear hunting areas in coastal Alaska are remote and can only be accessed by boat or plane.

## MEAT CARE BEGINS BEFORE LEAVING HOME

Hunters who harvest black bears specifically for their meat know what other hunters may not — black bear meat can make a delicious wild game meal. The quality and flavor of black bear meat can change depending on the bear's diet and many hunters prefer meat from spring bears, as their diet is mainly vegetation during this time.

The following tips will help ensure proper care and preparation of black bear meat.

**Learn:** Research butchering and meat care at the local library, butcher, or the ADF&G website. If planning to have a rug or mount made out of the bear hide, make sure to visit a taxidermist before the hunt.

**Gear:** Collect and test all the equipment needed for butchering, hauling and caring for game meat. Recommended list: skinning knife, butchering knife, latex gloves, trimming knife, sharpener, bone saw, tarp, heavy-duty game bags, plastic bags, heavy-duty backpack, paper towels, rope, and a first-aid kit.

**Meat storage:** Plan in advance for meat processing, packaging and for shipment or transport home. Contact a local butcher or meat processing shop or ensure home equipment is ready. Secure proper long-term storage for the processed meat.

## FROM FIELD TO TABLE

**Don't shoot if it can't be packed out:** Before shooting, determine if all meat can be packed to camp and out of the field before it spoils. If uncertain — don't shoot!

**Keep meat cool, clean, dry and on the bone:** As the old saying goes, "Once you pull the trigger, the fun stops and the work begins." There are several ways to gut and butcher big game animals. Whichever method is chosen, remember to keep the meat cool, clean, and dry. If the meat needs to be kept for a few days, it is best to keep the meat on the bone and enclosed in breathable cloth game bags. Heat and moisture are the two greatest threats to good meat! To cool the meat, remove the hide as quickly as possible and get the meat away from internal organs. Once back at camp hang the meat with a tarp suspended above (but not touching it) to keep the meat dry while it develops a hard crust.

**Protect the meat from bacteria and flies:** If insects are a problem, once the meat is hanging, remove the game bag and spray the meat with a citric acid mixture. Food-grade citric acid can be purchased at most pharmacies. Mix two ounces of citric acid to one quart of water and spray the meat until the mixture runs off. The mixture should dry quickly. It will help prevent bacterial growth and help repel blowflies. Finally, return the meat to breathable cloth game bags for transport.

**Caring for the hide:** Regardless of whether or not the hide will be mounted, evidence of sex (penis sheath or vaginal orifice) must remain naturally attached to the hide. Always keep it clean, cool and dry. Placing a tarp under the bear when skinning will help keep debris out of the fur and then immediately place the hide in a high quality game bag.

**Prepare meat for the freezer:** Once the meat is out of the field, the butchering process can begin. Bear meat requires no aging and tends to spoil more quickly than other big game. Aging does not improve the flavor or tenderness of bear meat and actually tends to dry and toughen it. It is best to freeze, can or cook the meat within a week after the animal is killed, as the flavor becomes stronger with age.

Take time to strip all fat from the meat and wrap the cuts well to avoid freezer-burn. The freezer life of bear meat is roughly six months at -10 degrees F or nine months at -20 degrees F.

**Cook bear meat safely:** Black bear meat can carry the parasite *Trichinella spiralis* (which causes the disease trichinosis). The meat must be cooked thoroughly to ensure the parasite (if present) is killed. Bear meat is safe if a few simple preparation procedures are followed. The recommended cooking temperature for bear is 375 degrees F for 20-25 minutes per pound. For cuts of meat larger than three pounds, the time should be doubled. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, whole cuts and ground meat from black bear should be cooked to an internal temperature of 160 degrees F. A meat thermometer should be used because color is not a good indicator of doneness for game meat. Some methods of cooking, especially microwave cooking (which is not recommended), do not cook meat evenly. Smoking, freezing, or curing game meat does not kill all *Trichinella* species.

**Give away what can't be used:** If all harvested meat can't be used, give it away. Hunters must fill out a "Transfer of Possession" form if the meat is unprocessed (available in the back of the hunting regulations book); a copy of this form should go to the recipient and the original should stay with the hunter. Processed meat can be given away freely. Any meat that is given away should be in the same or better condition as any meat that would be kept.

## HIDE CARE

If the hide is not cared for properly, the hair will slip, especially when moisture and bacteria are allowed to accumulate. Best practice is to flesh the hide as soon as possible after skinning. After fleshing, hunters have two choices: freeze it unsalted; or turn the ears, split the lips, and remove each foot down to the final knuckle, nearest

the claw, then heavily salt the hide. Hides destined for a taxidermist should be well cared for and delivered as soon as possible for the best outcome. Keep the hide cool and dry until processing is possible — whether by a professional or at home. Never store the hide in a plastic bag. However, exceptions may be required to accommodate shipping or air transport.

## PLANNING THE HUNT

The key to a successful hunt is careful and thorough planning and preparation. Find hunt planning information online at: [hunt.alaska.gov](http://hunt.alaska.gov). The “Hunt Planning” section pages feature detailed information on everything from equipment checklists to meal planning.

There are several options for how to set up a hunt trip, just be sure to plan ahead. Coastal Alaska is a temperate rainforest making it critical to be prepared for wet or rapidly-changing weather.

### Leave no trace

Whether staying in a cabin or camping out, all sites should be left as if no one had been there before.

- Camp at least 200 ft. from established trails.
- Bury human waste far from trails and camp; burn toilet paper.
- Dismantle fire rings, field tables and all site modifications.

## TRAVELING IN BEAR COUNTRY

Follow these pointers to avoid unpleasant encounters with bears:

- Avoid attracting bears to camping/cabin sites by reducing odors around camp, keeping food securely stored and cooking area clean.
- Don’t camp on bear trails or near high use areas, such as salmon streams.
- Burn trash and food garbage. Pack out non-burnable items.

- Store food in bear proof containers, inside a cabin, or use a back country electric fence.

### Avoid surprising a bear.

- Be alert along noisy streams, in thick brush, and when visibility is poor.
- Make noise (sing, clap, talk) when not actively hunting.
- Enter thickets upwind so your smell will alert bears.
- If there is the scent of decomposing meat — STOP! It may be a bear's food cache. Bears often cover their food with branches or forest litter and sleep nearby between feedings.

## CONSIDERATION FOR OTHER WILDLIFE VIEWERS AND VISITORS

Coastal Alaska offers some of the most phenomenal bear hunting opportunities anywhere in the state, as well as unique opportunities for wildlife viewing.

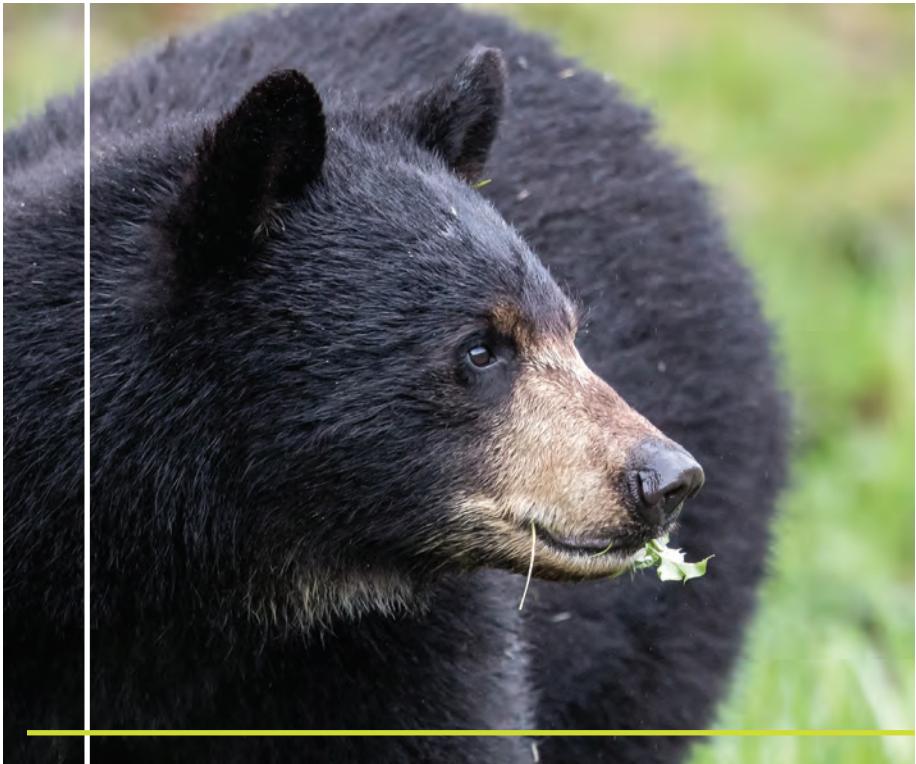
In Southeast, two designated black bear viewing sites exist where hunting is prohibited:

- Anan Creek (located on the south side of Bradfield Canal, in Unit 1B)
- Margaret Creek (located in Traitor's Cove on the west side of Revillagigedo Island, in Unit 1A).

Remember to follow all hunting laws and respect areas closed to hunting. Additional questions about the boundaries of the closed areas, can be directed to an ADF&G area office.

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Contact the Division of Wildlife Conservation at (907) 465-4190  
for alternative formats of this publication.



Hunters are important founders of the modern wildlife conservation movement. They, along with trappers and sport shooters, provided funding for this publication through payment of federal taxes on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment, and through state hunting license and tag fees.

