

FLORIDA BLACK BEAR

Ursus americanus floridanus



Order: Carnivora

Family: Ursidae

FNAI Ranks: G5T4/S4

U.S. Status: none

FL Status: none

Description: A large mammal (3 to 3.5 ft. = 2.8 - 3.2 m at the shoulder) with glossy black hair and a brown muzzle. Females average approximately 180 lbs. (82 kg); males average approximately 250 lbs. (113 kg). Individuals in southern Florida may lose their dorsal guard hairs, exposing the woolly brown undercoat. A white chest patch may be present on approximately 30% of individuals (FWC, 2012). Tail is short and inconspicuous. Ears are round and widely separated. In males, front feet range from 3.5 - 5.5 in. (89 -140 mm) by 3.3 - 5.9 in. (84 - 150 mm); rear feet measure 3 in. (76 mm) by 5.5 - 8.7 in. (140 - 221 mm). Sign may include shredded cabbage palm and saw palmetto, torn-up logs, and gouges in trees, about 6 ft. above ground level. Scat (droppings) may be similar to that of dogs, but may vary in consistency and may contain a mix of insect parts, seeds, and sometimes hair.

Similar Species: A large, black dog or a hog could be mistaken for a small black bear, but does not compare in size or foot measurements.

Habitat: A wide variety of forested communities is needed to support the varied seasonal diet of black bears. Forested wetlands are particularly important for diurnal cover. Baygalls (bayheads) are important for cover and dens.

Seasonal Occurrence: May be active year-round, except for pregnant females that must den, usually between December and April. Winter activity is highly variable among individuals and years.

Florida Distribution: Widely distributed throughout FL, occupying about 45% of its historical range (Humm, 2017). Concentrations occur on Eglin Air Force Base, in the Apalachicola basin, Osceola NF and adjacent Pinhook Swamp, Gulf Hammock WMA, Ocala NF, St. Johns River basin, and the Big Cypress and Lake Wales Ridge regions.

Range-wide Distribution: Florida, extreme southern Alabama, and southeastern

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Georgia.

Conservation Status: Managed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as a game species. Protected through various Florida rules, including the Bear Conservation Rule (F.A.C. 68A-4.009). Removed from Florida Endangered and Threatened Species Rule (68A-27.003) in 2012.

Protection and Management: Maintain a diversity of habitats over extensive acreage that includes nut and fruit producing plants and dense baygalls that are inaccessible to humans.

References: Brown 1997, FWC 2012, Hall 1981, Humm 2017, Humphrey (ed.) 1992, Whitaker 1996.



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