

BEaR Meeting – 10/3/07

Attendees: Kevin Nelms, Bo Sloan, Becky Rosamond, Ray Aycock, Shauna Ginger, Sabrina Chandler, Jim Monk, Paul Davidson, Hunter Fordice, D.L. Wesley, Everard Baker, Brad Young, Kathy Shelton, Stephanie Hodnett, Richard Rummel, Ray Aycock, Shaun Williamson, Daniel Sumerall, Debbie Fuller, Glynda Clardy, Melissa Darden, Lynne Moses, Cathy Shropshire, Ed Hackett

Meeting was called to order by Kevin Nelms, BEaR President, at 1:06 p.m. Kevin announced that meeting schedule will now be March and October.

Mississippi Bears – Brad Young

- Now working over at the Wildlife Bureau, instead of at the museum. Program still the same.
- Bait station survey –
 - First time
 - Established on 8 WMA's in south delta and coastal counties
 - Each transect minimum of 5 miles
 - 134 bait stations (3 cans sardines per station) – 2 hits – Sunflower and Mahannah
 - This is an index, compare in future years.
- 2007 bear sightings/den checks
 - F920 – crossed in '05 originally, has a GPS collar, denned in 12 year-old WRP tract in fall '06. Checked first week of March. 2 female cubs – first cubs born in MS Delta since 1974. Since then seen with cubs periodically – most recent mid-September. Retrieved GPS collar data – ranged over about 50 sq. miles,
 - T6 – (5-cub female) did not have cubs this year. Could not replace collar. Has moved south to Louisiana
 - D21 – Wilkenson Co. Female. 3 cubs last year, has at least 2 (probably all 3 survived).
 - D610 – large Yazoo NWR male – down on Eagle lake. GPS collar malfunctioned so difficult to locate.
 - H910 – Yazoo NWR, denned in willow tree, was out of tree when checked, has yearling with her. Starting in May moved in big loop as far north as Lambert, returned to Yazoo, went south to Twin Oaks then back north and finally caught in Anguilla in trap. Replaced collar with GPS collar. Still in Delta N.F. Did not see the yearling cub when caught.
 - D650 – caught in hogtrap in '05 initially – damaged teeth – collar was about to die and wanted to replace with GPS collar. When originally caught 275 lbs. now 420 lbs. Denned in log pile along Yazoo River. Replaced collar. Since then has moved, last seen in median south of Yazoo City
 - E050 - Caught in Anguilla following female. Right ear gone – tag missing, recollared with GPS collar. (Had lost previous collar)
- Information and Education
 - Brochures available

- State law – any hog trap built must have a hole in top for deer/bear/turkey to escape.

Update on Bears in Neighboring States – Shauna Ginger

- TX – Nathan Garner – Stephen F. Austin and Wildlife and Parks – Hair bait stations. Photos of 2 different bears. Continue study, going on in east Texas.
- LA – Debbie Fuller – moved 6 females, 13 cubs, mostly off Tensas refuge all went to Three Rivers WMA. Female with 5 cubs on Cat Island NWR. On-going research - Tensas River population studies, getting ready to start study in upper Atchafalaya. Hurricane money used to look at bear habitat needs for coastal bears.

BBCC Report – Paul Davidson

- Fund raising banquet in mid-September (like DU banquet) – net over \$20K
- Looking at alternate ways to raise money
- Will be focusing more on Atchafalaya Basin rather than on previously focused on area. (Paul) Working with private landowners to show how they can manage the basin for bear and sustainability. Few landowners own bulk of Basin. Need to get the landowners on board to support bear issues.
- Need population data in coastal zone. (Paul) Begin meeting with corporate interests on the coast to fund hair/dna study on coast.
- Have 20 years of good data on LA black bear, but lacking data on coast population.

Critical Habitat Designation for Louisiana Black Bear – Debbie Fuller

- The USFWS will be designating critical habitat
 - Highly bureaucratic and time-consuming
 - Open to suggestions, but may not be able to publicize some aspects until published in federal register
- Will continue ongoing efforts of restoring habitat
- When species listed, make decision regarding whether to designate critical habitat.
- Critical habitat – geographic area with physical elements species need to survive.
 - For bear, proposed in 1993 – bottomland hardwood forest, but never finished.
 - FWS sued in 2005 to get critical habitat designated.
 - Need to review 1993 proposal and decide if prudent (regarding publishing maps showing locations of endangered species: essentially will it hurt the species more if habitat is designated?) to designate habitat. If so, must be in Federal Register by April 2008.
 - Changes since original designation
 - More focused now
 - Have much better information re: bears
- Additionally, bear 5-year status review is also due. Standard practice – evaluation whether designation (threatened, endangered) is warranted and correct. (Coincidental that happened at same time as lawsuit.)
- Questions –

- Agenda of plaintiffs in case – Don't think we're doing enough for bear. (plaintiff has been involved in several cases in Atchafalaya Basin – may have other agenda)
- What impact will Critical habitat designation have on landowners and stakeholders? – only applies to Federal actions. Only Federal agencies have to consult ES on critical habitat. Private landowners only have to worry if they require a federal permit. Currently consult on bear issues and have not had project stopped due to bear. Don't foresee any problems.
- Healthy Forest Reserve – currently in south MS, may be extended into bottomland hardwood forest. Will it impact this program? Don't know yet. 1993 document focuses on converting bottomland hardwood into ag, not restoring bottomland hardwood. Additionally, can exclude certain areas from designation if benefits of exclusion outweigh the costs of including them
- Question: With increase of bears in MS do you think the 50 point zone (previously in LA) will expand into MS? Small part across from Tensas originally, in MS. Remember critical habitat is habitat essential for recovery of species, not just every acre that could be used by bear.
- Question: Do you focus on current range, historical range? Regulations say that area occupied when listed.
- Question: How define bottomland hardwood? Generally used to mean MAV bottomland hardwood - has hydrologic component. Probably have caveats to include forests in coastal counties.

Bears: A Private Landowner Perspective – Hunter Fordice

- WRP Tract used to advertise WRP success story – has received media attention and gotten good publicity for BEaR Group (per Kevin)
- Landowners have made capital investments in assets, but need agency support to manage it correctly.
- Bear story
 - Oct. 99 – found scat on own property in Sharkey Co. Reported to FS and was confirmed that male bear in area
 - June 05 – found fresh tracks (< 24 hrs old) near soybean field, decided probably good-sized male bear roaming through area
 - Dec 06 – in box stand with daughter, had bear come under and in front of stand then run off - exhilarating – first time actually saw bear
 - Jan 07 – in food plot saw probably same bear (probably 2-year old that had crossed with the “WRP bear” (female denned on property) Fed about 5 minutes on food plot.
 - Feb 07 – confirmed that bear was denned on property in WRP area and that there were at least 2 cubs.
 - March 07 – conducted den check and confirmed 2 female cubs (21 people there to see and/or help) – amazing experience for him and family
 - Saw cubs August 4th and see again more recently so know are surviving – fact that 2 females born, hope they'll stay in the general area and breed in 4 – 5 years.

- Good feeling to experience having a bear use your property, knowing that it's using habitat you're providing.
- Critical to recognize that efforts of private landowners and various programs (federal, state, private) have provided the habitat that was needed for this endangered species to survive and reproduce and led to providing suitable habitat. (Majority of sightings have been on WRP land)
- Demonstrates and validates that partnerships between private landowners and federal government are successful.
- As stands now, no negative side-effects of having bear on property
- Believes surrounding landowners feel similarly
- Recognizes that as time goes by and numbers increase, feelings may change but will deal with it as comes
- Believes educating landowners and general public vital for the program to succeed.

Reducing Forest Fragmentation for an Endangered Species: Landscape-Scale Reforestation Planning Efforts for the Louisiana Black Bear – Shauna Ginger

- Private landowners key to endangered species recovery (>71% of lands privately owned)
- Several conservation programs to provide incentives to landowners
- Need to prioritize resources at landscape-scale.
- First landscape scale planning in LMAV for forest birds, since developed ranking for areas for black bear
 - Used telemetry data, occupied habitat, movement areas – came up with priority restoration areas.
 - Looked at corridor sites and looked at public ownership, private with conservation programs, and private lands. Considered what might be converted into Forest.
 - LA WRP special project – priority rating if within proposed corridor area.
 - MS – 1994 developed endangered species areas (black bear or pondberry), expanded in 1999 to include batture land.
 - 2005 developed priority map for LA black bear (LA and MS)
- Have up to 830,000 acres in WRP
- Many programs, but can be difficult to wade through programs.
- 5 litters (12 cubs) born on WRP lands since 2004 (these are only from radiocollared bears – only represents a small percentage of bears out there)
- Restoration priorities are working
- Need to balance economics and environmental components
- Key to all of this is partners

Administrative

- Approval of previous and membership report – Becky Rosamond, Jim made motion, Cathy seconded. Approved.
- Financial Report – Stephanie Hodnett,

Project Progress

- Website – Shauna Ginger
 - Up and running
 - Can modify ourselves
 - Can also purchase merchandise and memberships through website

- Entergy Grant – Becky Rosamond
 - Received Entergy grant for \$15,000 for education an research
 - Paid Charlie \$2,000 for flight time
 - Spent about \$1,500 on education booth
 - Entertaining suggestions for additional projects that fall under education or research.

- Bear booth – Kevin Nelms
 - Purchasing tabletop display and 2 tablecloths with bear logo with name of group written out
 - Natalie Perkins, Deer Creek Pilot – adding color to graphics for us for booth
 - Will locally print photos etc. once we figure out what to put on it
 - Will also order replica bear skull, scat, etc. to draw folks in

- Bear calender – Cathy Shropshire
 - Fundraiser for us and MWF – entirely paid for by sponsors
 - Educational tool – walks you through a bear’s year
 - Sell calendars!

- SAFE Restoring Bear Habitat in MS with CRP – Daniel Sumeral/Kevin Nelms
 - New component of CRP announced this year
 - State acreage for wildlife enhancement
 - Other agencies/groups can tailor a CRP practice for endangered or threatened species
 - Have submitted a SAFE proposal for bears to restore 7,950 acres of MAV, must be bottomland hardwoods/semipermanent wetlands.
 - Will be a CRP practice – will be administered by NRCS
 - USDA would pay about \$9.9 million to landowners. 15 year contract
 - Monitoring component \$600,000 – GPS collars etc.
 - Has been submitted to the state – 5900 acres SAFE acres given to MS and national pot of 50,000 acres, has been sent up to national level. Potentially may be able to get more acres than requested.

- GDBA Project Update 2007 – Melissa Darden
 - 6th annual
 - Have schedules of events
 - 60 and 30 mile bike rides – new event
 - Need volunteers for the day for the children’s activities
 - Theme “bear tracks through history”
 - “Bear Essentials” store
 - Raffle tickets

- Beekeepers Association – D.L. Wesley
 - Good news – MS is 22nd in production of honey, 1st in amount/hive (in U.S.)
 - Africanized beekeepers meeting tomorrow – will begin educational program, so far only state in south without Africanized bees. Do have plans in place for when they get here
 - Colony collapse has been identified – virus from overseas (3 years ago). Transmitted from bee to bee. Worker bees die when leave hive.
 - New critter – small hive beetle, chases out queen and workers and takes over hive
 - Bad news – tracheal mite treatment (in place 20 years) no longer works

Old Business – Action items from previous meetings

- Resubmit grant to Entergy – Kevin, Shauna, Brad – done and received grant
- Amend bylaws to reflect change in dues – Kevin – done, will be on website soon
- Send Annual Report to heads of agencies – Kevin- done
 - Homer Willis(NRCS)
 - Tony Dickson (FS)
 - Butch Brown (MDOT)
 - Charlie Morgan (MS For. Comm.)
 - Trudy Fisher (DEQ)
- Draft letter to NRCS regarding appraisal process and WRP – Ray - unsure
- T-shirt fundraiser - Bo – no progress to date

New Business

- Stephanie Allison – project proposal – hwy 16 bear crossing signage through Delta NF.
 - BEaR buy signs, Delta NF will put up and provide posts
 - Asking for \$200
 - Group suggests using single bear with “BEAR XING” underneath on separate sign
 - Motion made for Stephanie to purchase 4 signs (\$400) by Becky Rosamond, Melissa Darden seconded
- Motion for “official” DOT bear crossing signs spending up to \$2,000 for use in various parts of the state – motion made by Becky Rosamond, seconded by Bo Sloan

Action Items

Sabrina – check into DOT sign order – cost, minimum number, check into standardized sign quickly

Meeting adjourned at 4:25 p.m.