

Questions & Answers

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Louisiana Black Bear Removal from the Lists of Threatened and Endangered Species Due To Recovery

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced on March 10, 2016, it will officially remove the Louisiana black bear (*Ursus americanus luteolus*) from the Lists of Threatened and Endangered Wildlife under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) due to recovery. The Service published a proposed rule to delist the bear on May 21, 2015.

1. Why is the Service delisting the Louisiana black bear?

Due to the efforts of the Service and its partners the threats to the Louisiana black bear have been eliminated or reduced, and adequate regulatory mechanisms exist for its long-term protection. The subspecies is viable over the next 100 years with sufficient protected habitat to support breeding and exchange between subpopulations. Past habitat loss trends have been reversed through a variety of programs and regulations, and there is currently enough suitable habitat to continue expansion and movement between breeding subpopulations.

Our analysis of the best available science and data shows the Louisiana black bear is not in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range (the definition of an Endangered species); nor is it likely to become Endangered within the foreseeable future (the definition of a Threatened species). The delisting criteria for recovery have been met. We have at least one viable subpopulation in the Tensas River Basin, and one in the Atchafalaya River Basin. There has been documented interchange between these subpopulations through the reintroduced subpopulation, now established between them. A substantial amount of forested habitat has also been permanently protected through conservation easements and public ownership to benefit these subpopulations. In response to conservation efforts of the Service and partners, the Louisiana black bear's abundance and distribution has increased across its range.

2. How was the Louisiana black bear successfully recovered?

The Louisiana black bear has recovered because of the active partnerships of many private landowners, state and federal agencies, universities and non-governmental organizations. Since the Louisiana black bear was listed in 1992, voluntary landowner-incentive-based habitat restoration programs and environmental regulations have not only stopped the net loss of forested lands in the Lower Mississippi River Alluvial River Valley, but have resulted in significant habitat gains. Public management areas such as National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs), Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), and U.S. Corps of Engineers lands that support Louisiana black bear subpopulations are also protected and managed in a way that benefits the Louisiana black bear. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in coordination with the Service and U.S. Geological Survey developed a database that is used to track bear occurrences, captures, and mortalities to better manage subpopulations.

In addition, from 2001 to 2009, the Service and its partners implemented a multi-year Louisiana black bear reintroduction project (in an area containing approximately 100,000 acres of publicly owned forested land), which led to the establishment of a new subpopulation that adds to the size and viability of the overall bear population that facilitates exchange between existing subpopulations. Large-scale restoration and protection of key habitats, coupled with the benefits of that reintroduction program, have been instrumental in stabilizing and expanding the Louisiana black bear population.

3. Why was the Louisiana black bear listed as Threatened under the ESA?

The Louisiana black bear was listed as a threatened subspecies in January 1992 primarily because of the modification and reduction of its habitat, the reduced quality of remaining habitat due to fragmentation, and the threat of future habitat conversion and human-related mortality (57 FR 588). Habitat fragmentation also isolated already small bear subpopulations, which increased risks associated with natural population fluctuations and inbreeding.

4. What is the estimated population of the Louisiana black bear?

The Service estimates that 500 to 750 bears are distributed across the subspecies' current range. This is approximately double the population size at the time of listing. Population estimates have been generated through multiple studies since the listing of the Louisiana black bear, including live trapping, winter den inspections, radio telemetry monitoring, and capture-mark-recapture (through non-invasive DNA sampling) methods.

5. What is the current range of the Louisiana black bear?

At the time of listing, the three existing breeding subpopulations were restricted to the Lower Mississippi River Alluvial River Valley (LMRAV) in East Carroll, Madison, Point Coupee, St. Mary, and Iberia Parishes, Louisiana. Today, numbers of bears in those original subpopulations have increased. Several new breeding subpopulations are forming (one core subpopulation in Louisiana and several satellite subpopulations in Louisiana and Mississippi); and, the range of Louisiana black bear breeding subpopulations has increased more than 340 percent from an estimated 340,000 acres at the time of listing to a current estimate of 1,424,000 acres in Louisiana and another 382,703 acres in Mississippi, for a total of 1,806,556 acres. That expanded area now includes areas in part or all of 21 Louisiana parishes and six Mississippi counties primarily within and adjacent to the LMRAV.

6. How did the Service determine that this subspecies has recovered?

The Service determined from its review of recent research findings and the results of its revised five-factor analysis that delisting is warranted (The five factors that determine if a species warrants delisting are: damage to or destruction of a species' habitat; overutilization of the species; disease or predation; inadequacy of existing protection; and other natural or manmade factors that affect the continued.) In addition to that analysis, the Service also evaluated the recovery criteria in the subspecies' recovery plan and have determined that all criteria have been met. To change a species' classification, the Service must complete a formal rulemaking process that includes peer review and the opportunity for public comment. The final rule provides responses to those comments and questions, the five-factor analysis of threats, and a review of the recovery criteria in the recovery plan.

7. How do you know that there is enough habitat to support a viable Louisiana black bear population?

The results of recent population studies indicate that the currently available habitat is sufficient to sustain a viable Louisiana black bear population for the foreseeable future. Much of that habitat is held in federal and state ownership and/or is protected through various regulatory mechanisms. The extent of protected habitat continues to increase, primarily from voluntary landowner, incentive-based habitat restoration programs.

8. How do you know the improvement in the Louisiana black bear population is enough to delist?

When the bear was listed, only three breeding subpopulations were known to exist, all in Louisiana. Today, the Louisiana black bear population consists of several breeding subpopulations in Louisiana and Mississippi. Taken together, three of those subpopulations now form a metapopulation (breeding groups with exchange of individuals) that meet the recovery plan criteria, and are predicted to exist for the next 100 years. The presence of additional subpopulations in the Lower Atchafalaya River Basin, and elsewhere in Louisiana and Mississippi, only serves to improve overall population viability. For example, the Lower Atchafalaya River Basin subpopulation remains the second largest Louisiana black bear subpopulation and has approximately doubled in size in just the last 10 years. In addition, this subpopulation has a positive population growth rate. It should also be noted that there is approximately 400,000 acres of currently unoccupied habitat within the Louisiana black bear habitat restoration planning area (HRPA), and a substantial amount of suitable, yet unoccupied, habitat beyond the HRPA (in both Louisiana, western Mississippi, and eastern Texas) that will enable further expansion of the Louisiana black bear population.

9. Did the Service consider sea level rise and climate change in this rule?

Yes. The Service reviewed and analyzed all known threats, including habitat loss (due to conversion for development and agricultural use), climate change, sea-level rise, human-associated mortality, disease, predation, and the sufficiency of state and local laws or programs to protect habitat and the species. Because of their abundance, distribution, adaptability, mobility, and demonstrated ability to survive extreme climatic events, Louisiana black bears are highly resilient to losses that might occur from climate change and associated threats.

10. Does a species have to be restored to its entire historical range before it can be delisted?

No. The ESA does not require that a species be restored to its entire historical range or any specific amount of its historical range. The listing or delisting of an animal or plant from the list of endangered and threatened species is based on a five-factor analysis of the potential threats to a species' current range and its risk of extinction. To learn more about what the five-factor analysis is click [here](#).

11. What happened between the proposed rule and the final rule to delist?

No substantive changes were made between the proposed and final rule. On May 21, 2015, the Service published a proposed rule to remove the Louisiana black bear from the List of Threatened and Endangered Wildlife. At that time, we solicited information and comments from the public and

scientific experts. During the comment period for the proposed rule, we received 126 comment letters or statements. They were condensed into 64 comments (some individuals commented more than once) that were addressed in the final rule, and covered subjects such as current population numbers and range, taxonomic classification and implications, hunting, sea level rise, development, habitat protection, and future monitoring.

12. How will delisting impact project planning and consultation?

Planners for residential and commercial development or other projects that involve permanent clearing of Louisiana black bear habitat will no longer be required to consult with the Service. Federal, state and local laws that provide protection to habitats utilized by the Louisiana black bear, but that are not dependent on the species' federal status, will continue to be in effect, including the State and Local Coastal Resources Management Act of 1978, as amended (LA. R.S. 49:214.21-214.41), "Swampbuster" provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1972.

13. When the Louisiana black bear is removed from the Endangered Species List, will it be legal to hunt or kill them?

No. Black bears will remain protected by state laws, which currently do not allow hunting of these animals. If hunting of Louisiana black bears were to be permitted in the future, states would be responsible for initiating and managing hunting regulations. The public will also still be required to contact state agencies to resolve nuisance bear issues.

14. How do we know that the Louisiana black bear will remain secure?

The Service, in coordination with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, has developed a draft post-delisting monitoring (PDM) plan for the Louisiana black bear that will guide us in monitoring the Louisiana black bear population for seven years after it is delisted. That plan has details about monitoring methods, reporting procedures, and agency responsibilities. Multiple monitoring strategies will be used in order to assure that population trends and habitat status will be captured at various time periods, respectively. Population trend monitoring will involve live-capture, non-invasive mark-recapture methods (through hair snaring), radio-collaring, winter den checks, and telemetry monitoring to estimate reproductive rates, survival, genetic exchange, and cause-specific mortality in a timely manner. There also will be a habitat-based monitoring component that will include an assessment of habitat abundance, persistence, and any changes in protection using interpretation of remotely sensed data and updated GIS information (e.g., conservation easements). The PDM is designed to detect declines in Louisiana black bear populations (at extremely early stages) and has threshold triggers that would allow for corrective actions to be taken.

If PDM yields substantial information indicating that a threat is causing a decline in the status of the Louisiana black bear since the time of delisting, then the Service would initiate a formal status review to assess changes in threats to the species as defined in the PDM plan. If it is determined appropriate, the Service would propose that the Louisiana black bear be relisted under the ESA in accordance with Section 4 of the Act. Also, depending on the scope and immediacy of the threat, the Service could use the emergency listing provisions provided under the ESA.

15. How many species have been removed from the endangered species list due to recovery?

Of the U.S. species for which the Service has the lead, 31 plants and animals have been removed from the list since 1967 due to recovery. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has been the lead agency for other marine species that have been delisted under the ESA.

16. How can I read the final rule or find more information about the Louisiana black bear?

For more information about the Louisiana black bear, visit our [species profile page](#) or the [ECOS database](#). You can find the final rule and supporting documents at [regulations.gov](#) (FWS-R4-ES-2015-0014). Related documents also are at our [Louisiana Field Office website](#).

17. Where can I go to see a Louisiana black bear?

Currently, most Louisiana black bears live within four areas of Louisiana, including: (1) St. Mary and Iberia Parishes in south Louisiana, (2) Point Coupee Parish in central Louisiana, (3) the Richard K. Yancey WMA and vicinity in Concordia and Avoyelles Parishes, in east-central Louisiana, and (4) Tensas, Madison, and West Carroll Parishes in northeast Louisiana. Bears may be occasionally encountered in other areas within their range, as male bears sometimes wander long distances from the area of their birth. Bears have been sighted in recent years within many parishes throughout Louisiana, as well as in western and southern Mississippi. Publicly accessible lands provide the best opportunity to potentially see a Louisiana black bear and they include Bayou Teche NWR, Richard K. Yancey WMA, Big Lake WMA, and Tensas River NWR. Please consult, and adhere to, the respective public-land regulations prior to visiting these sites.