



Connecticut Department of
**ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Public Hearing – March 8, 2018
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Robert J. Klee

House Bill No. 5358 – AN ACT AUTHORIZING BEAR HUNTING IN LITCHFIELD COUNTY.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding House Bill 5358 – AN ACT AUTHORIZING BEAR HUNTING IN LITCHFIELD COUNTY. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) welcomes the opportunity to offer the following testimony.

We support the Committee’s interest in addressing the growing public safety concern associated with the expansion of Connecticut’s black bear population. It is the opinion of our wildlife biologists that bear hunting – with prudent limitations – is consistent with best practices for wildlife management in Connecticut.

Black bear disappeared from Connecticut in the 1800s due to extensive deforestation. Following the recovery of Connecticut’s forests, bears began returning in the late 1980’s. Today, black bear have become common in northwestern Connecticut and are regular visitors throughout the state.

Research conducted by the DEEP and the University of Connecticut has established that black bears are becoming increasingly common. UConn reports that, as of 2015, there were between 397 and 457 black bear in northwestern Connecticut and that bears were most abundant in towns with moderate housing density like Farmington, Simsbury and Avon. UConn’s results complement DEEP’s findings that the statewide black bear population continues to grow at a rate of nearly ten percent per year, and is now approximately 800 bears. Both studies conclude that, without controls, the population will continue to grow, eventually reaching a statewide total of around 3,000 animals.

With the growing bear population, reports of nuisance bears and of bold and aggressive bear behavior are increasing. In addition to the approximately 6,700 public sightings reported in 2016 (a 50 percent increase over 2015) we received 960 reports of property damage, the highest one year total in recent history. Similarly, the 43 bears killed by vehicles in 2016 was also among the highest one year totals.

Our current bear management involves public outreach and education, research and monitoring, and intervention. None of these has any effect on population growth or distribution. Hunting would present one more tool available to the agency, and the only tool to affect population growth, most notably

among habituated bears that research has established are more susceptible to hunter harvest than non-habituated bears. Relocating these animals is not a viable option because bears routinely travel long distances. In addition, bears tend to establish a home range, often returning to that home range within days after relocation. Furthermore, no other state in the region will condone relocating any Connecticut bear to their state.

If this bill becomes law, DEEP could proceed in crafting rules for a bear hunting program in Litchfield County that would help manage the population and curb the escalating rates of bear-human interactions, while ensuring that bears have a place in our state's ecosystem now and in the future.

In summary, DEEP supports House Bill No. 5358 – AN ACT AUTHORIZING BEAR HUNTING IN LITCHFIELD COUNTY as a prudent and necessary step in reducing the frequency and severity of threats posed by an expanding black bear population. If you should require any additional information, please contact Lee Sawyer, DEEP's legislative liaison, at 860.424.3332 or lee.sawyer@ct.gov.