**Bill No.:** SB-894

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING THE NONLETHAL MANAGEMENT OF THE BLACK BEAR POPULATION IN CONNECTICUT.

**Vote Date:** 3/18/2019

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 3/1/2019

**File No.:** 566

**Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.

**SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Environment Committee


**REASONS FOR BILL:**

With current re-forestation of Connecticut, the bear population has rebounded to where bears are now common in many parts of the state, estimated at a population of over 700 individuals. As the bear population grows, there is greater interaction between humans and bears – humans provide easy access to food sources and bears have no natural predators. These interactions can lead to nuisance issues and aggressive bear interactions. The bill seeks to find solutions to deter human-bear interactions by requiring the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to submit a report on best nonlethal management practices that are effective in deterring black bear from habituating in areas that are populated by humans.

**RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

Katie S. Dykes, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP): Supports the bill. The state’s black bear population has been steadily growing. DEEP has currently has used various deterrents as well as a robust public education component to manage bears. This bill will allow DEEP to assist the Environment Committee by providing a science-based report on best practices.
NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Annie Hornish, Connecticut Senior State Director, The Humane Society of the United States: The Humane Society of the United States supports the bill because it will allow the Connecticut Department on Energy and Environmental Protection to explore nonlethal bear management strategies. The alternative, trophy hunting of black bears, is problematic because (1) trophy hunting the small black bear population is not based on scientific approach, (2) trophy hunting bears fails to address human-bear conflicts, (3) bears are a slow reproducing species that are highly susceptible to human persecution, (4) human-bear conflicts are caused by food availability and not bear numbers, (5) solutions for addressing human-bear conflicts must be multi-faceted, (6) wildlife watchers outnumber wildlife recreational activities, and (7) black bears are important ecological actors that increase the biodiversity of their habitats.

Senator Eric Berthel, 32nd Senator Dist.: The black bear population in Connecticut has become unmanageable. In Litchfield County, wildlife biologists estimate that black bear population is growing 10% annually. Although rare, Black bears are large predatory animals that could attack humans – one such case occurred in New Jersey.

Fran Silverman, Communications Director, Friends of Animals: There were over 8,900 sighting of bears in Connecticut last year according to a Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP); however, not every sighting is a unique bear. According to a 2014 UConn study, there are just 200 bears in the Northwest corner. According to DEEP, the state has a capacity for 2000 bears. Hunting is not the most effective strategy to manage bear populations. Bears remaining after a hunt “will seek food if habituated by humans or harass livestock that are improperly fenced.” Additionally, since 1982 there has been 10 hunting fatalities in Connecticut, yet no humans have been killed by bear-human interactions. A strong public education program reducing the human-bear conflict is the best course of action for Connecticut. The state should focus on educating the public about mitigating human-bear conflict by (1) strengthening regulations deterring the feeding of bears and of properly securing livestock, and. (2) posting signs on state trails of what hikers should do when encountering a bear.

The Environment Committee received approximately 15 written testimonies in support. Some have supported this legislation stating nonlethal management of bears is a good alternative to bear hunting because, although bear sightings may be high, the bear population in the state is low. Others have supported the legislation because the bear population in the state is high and increasing, leading to more frequent contact between humans and bears.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Bryan Hurlburt, Executive Director, Connecticut Farm Bureau (CFBA): Bears are animals that cause havoc on farms, causing significant damage to crops. CFBA provides personal testimony of Laurelbook Farm’s $21,000 destruction in crop damage from bears. Although there are nonlethal methods being used to control bears, these are not effective. It
is unclear what new methods would be allowed that will be more effective than current tools used to manage black bears.

**David Johnson:** Shared personal testimony of making the decision to move family to Simsbury Connecticut, not knowing of the black bear conflicts. The black bear population is unchecked and causes public safety concerns.

**Michael Salter:** The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection is already conducting various nonlethal methods for addressing bear management, such as, the agency’s “Be Bear Aware” educational program and relocation of bears. The state should have a more active management program, such a limited bear hunting season.

Reported by: Pamela Bianca / Ussawin R. Bumpen  Date: 4/8/2019