HB1386_UNF_HSUS,MVFA.pdf

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HB1386
Black bear hunting – Permit Requirements

Environment and Transportation Committee
UNFAVORABLE

On behalf of our Maryland supporters and members, the Humane Society of the United States, and Maryland Votes for Animals, strongly oppose HB 1386. This bill expands the trophy hunting of black bears (*Ursus americanus*) by creating a lottery for western Maryland residents to receive additional bear-hunting permits if the Maryland Department of Natural Resources' goals are not reached. **The data simply does not support expanded bear hunting in Maryland**. The number of Maryland black bears is a guess as the last empirical bear count that the DNR conducted was in 2011—eleven years ago—and only in Garrett and Allegany counties. Now, its population count is based upon models and a highly fallible survey method that only marks presence or absence of bears but does not distinguish between individuals. Data from the DNR show:

▪ **The numbers of bears killed by hunters has trended downward significantly.** (This potentially signals a decline in the population—**particularly since the acorn mast crops have failed or have been generally poorly since 2017, according to DNR data**.[1])
▪ The number of bear permits the DNR issued already far exceeds the numbers of bears hunted. (For example, in 2016, the DNR issued **750 permits and only 167 hunters killed bears**; and in 2021, the DNR **issued 950 black bear permits while 54 hunters killed bears**.)

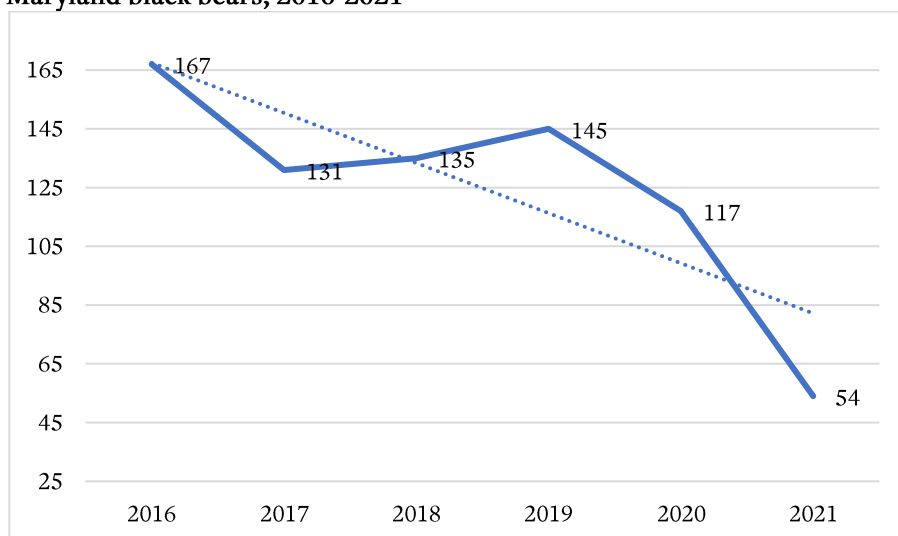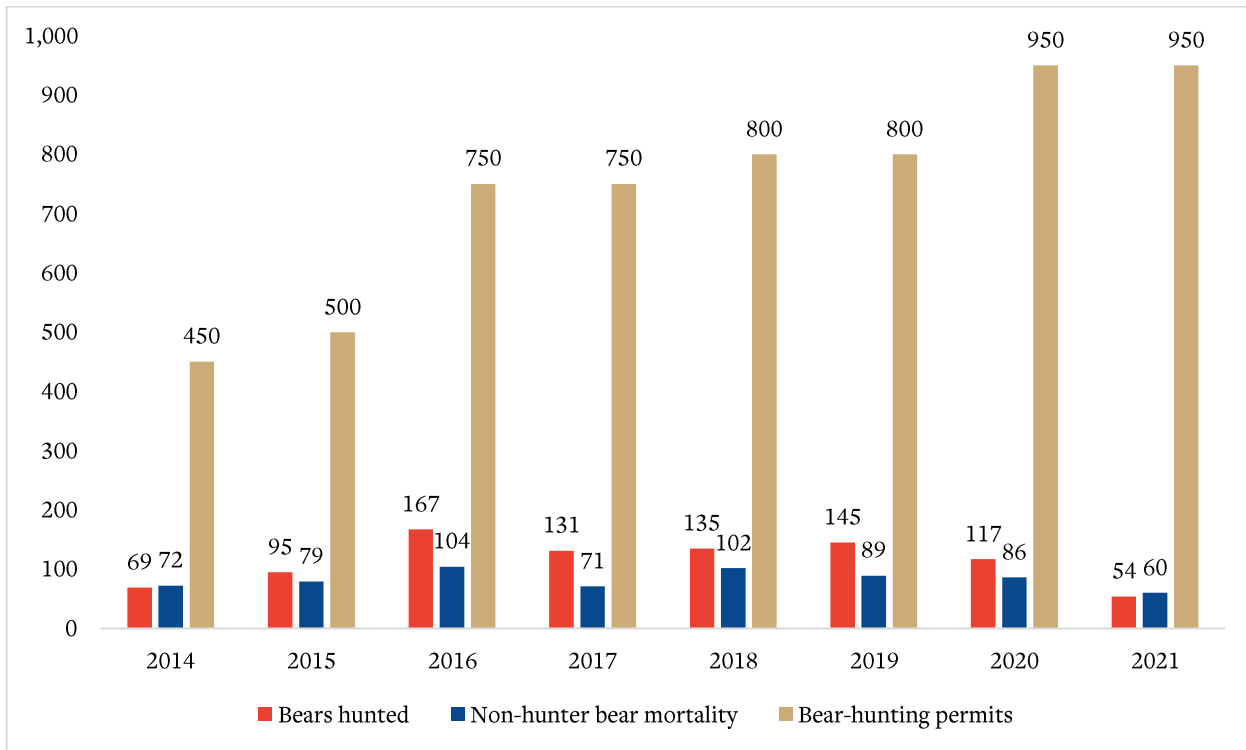**Fig. 1. Hunter kills of Maryland black bears, 2016-2021**

Fig. 2. Comparison of numbers of Maryland black bears hunted, Non-hunter bear mortality and Bear-hunting permits annually for the years 2014 to 2021

We respectfully request that the DNR investigate the sizes of Maryland's bear populations using sound, empirical study methods that involve capture, mark, recapture methods.[2] Because the DNR has already invested in trail cameras, one approach that is both cost effective and non-invasive could be using facial recognition technology that has been used for brown (grizzly) bears (*Ursus arctos*) in Canada.[3] Just using trail cameras alone, without facial recognition or hair snag DNA,[4] is simply anecdotal and invalid data.

In the absence of an empirical population study, Maryland should not be considering any expansion to the state's bear hunt. We urge an unfavorable report on HB 1386.

[1] Maryland Department of Natural Resources, "Western Maryland Mast Survey Summary," *https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Documents/2021_WMD_MastSurvey_Summary.pdf* (2021).

[2] USGS, "Capture-Mark-Recapture Science," *https://www.usgs.gov/centers/eesc/science/capture-mark-recapture-science* (2022).

[3] Melanie Clapham et al., "Automated Facial Recognition for Wildlife That Lack Unique Markings: A Deep Learning Approach for Brown Bears," *Ecology and evolution* 10, no. 23 (2020).

[4] Katherine C. Kendall and Kevin S. McKelvey, "Hair Collection," in *Noninvasive Survey Methods for Carnivores*, ed. Robert Long, et al. (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2008).