

A black bear is shown in profile, facing right, in a forest setting. The ground is covered with vibrant green moss and fallen brown leaves. A tree trunk is visible in the background. The scene is captured in a natural, slightly overcast light.

Bears in Our Backyard

Ecology, Dispersal, and Coexisting with Our Wild
Neighbors

By Lucas Andujar

Bear Biology: Appearance

- **Average Weight:** Range from 150 to 600 pound with males usually being larger than females
- **Average Height:** When on all fours bears will stand 3 feet on their hind legs they can reach around 7 feet.
- **Fur:** Typically have black fur, but variations in coat color exist, ranging from brown to cinnamon, and even blonde, particularly in some western populations.
- **Eyes:** Black bears have small, round eyes with good eyesight
- **Ears:** Their ears are highly mobile, allowing them excellent hearing and the ability to hear a wide range of sounds.
- **Muzzle:** The black bear's muzzle is long and slightly curved, which gives them an excellent sense of smell





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P35

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Bear Biology: Skills

Climbing:

Black bears are great climbers

Speed and Endurance:

Black bears can run up to 30 mph in short bursts and travel long distances when searching for food, often traveling tens of miles in a single day.

Swimming:

Black bears are skilled swimmers, often crossing rivers and lakes to find fish.

Hibernation:

Efficient hibernator

Do not drop body temp or heart rate significantly

Do not eat or use bathroom during hibernation



Bear Biology: Life Cycle

Birth and Early Development:

- Cubs are born altricial.
- Emerging from the den around March or April.

Dependency:

- Cubs remain with their mother for about 1.5 years, during which she teaches them how to find food and stay safe from predators.

Dispersal and Independence:

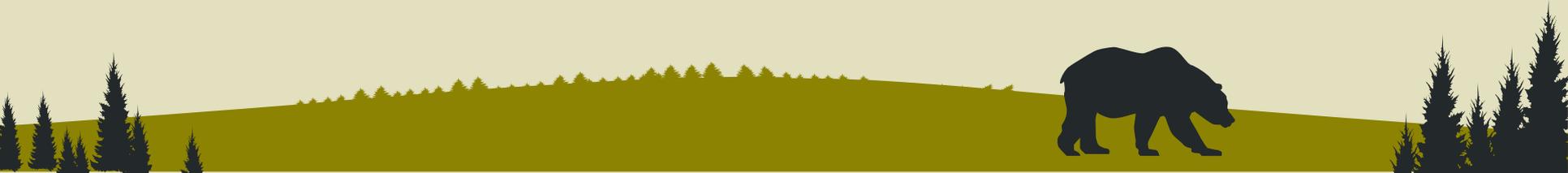
- Once they mature, cubs disperse from their mother. Female cubs may stay nearby, while males usually travel farther to establish their own territories.
- These younger bears are curious and often come into contact with humans.

Sexual Maturity and Reproduction:

- Black bears reach sexual maturity between 3-5 years. Females mature earlier than males.
- Mating season is in late spring to early summer. Females give birth in winter (January or February) after a delayed implantation period.

Lifespan and Mortality:

- In the wild, black bears can live up to 20-30 years.
- Once they reach 1-2 years, their chances of survival increase significantly.



Bear Biology: Diet

Diet Immediately After Emerging from Hibernation:

- Bears' primary goal is to build up food stores for the next hibernation.
- This need for food is the primary driver of human-bear conflicts.

Black Bears' Diet:

- Black bears are omnivores and eat a variety of foods:
 - Berries
 - Nuts
 - Insects
 - Fish
 - Small mammals



Human Food vs. Wild Food:

- Human-produced food and waste are often more calorie-rich than what bears would typically find in the wild.
- Human food is also easier for bears to access than wild food sources, increasing the likelihood of conflict.

Bear Biology: Habitat

Habitat Flexibility:

- Black bears are very adaptable.

Bears and low lying Wetlands:

- In my research, most local bears stay near lowland wetlands.
- Wetlands provide cover, food, and fewer predators (like humans), making them ideal for bears.

Importance of Travel Corridors:

- Travel corridors are crucial for movement through their “home ranges”, which can be 290 square miles for males and around 50 for females.
- Ward Pound Ridge is roughly about 7 square miles



Traditional Dispersal and Current Trends



Traditional Dispersal and Current Trends

Historical Displacement of Bears:

- Urbanization, industrial development, and human activities led to the displacement of bear populations from their traditional habitats.
- Deforestation, road construction, and habitat fragmentation contributed to the loss of crucial ecosystems for bears. The expansion of development also lead to negative interactions between human and bears.

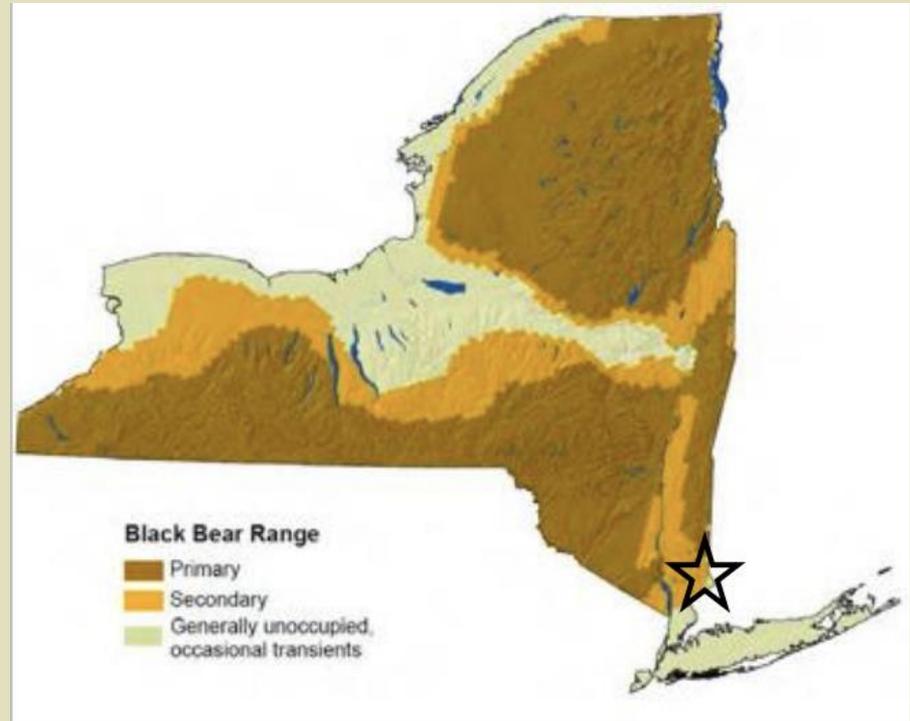
Recent Trends of Bear Resurgence:

- As a result of increased conservation efforts, in addition to the natural resilience and adaptability, many bear species are now beginning to reclaim their former habitats.
- Improved wildlife corridors, habitat restoration projects, and stricter regulations on land development have contributed to this shift.

Effects of Bear Resurgence:

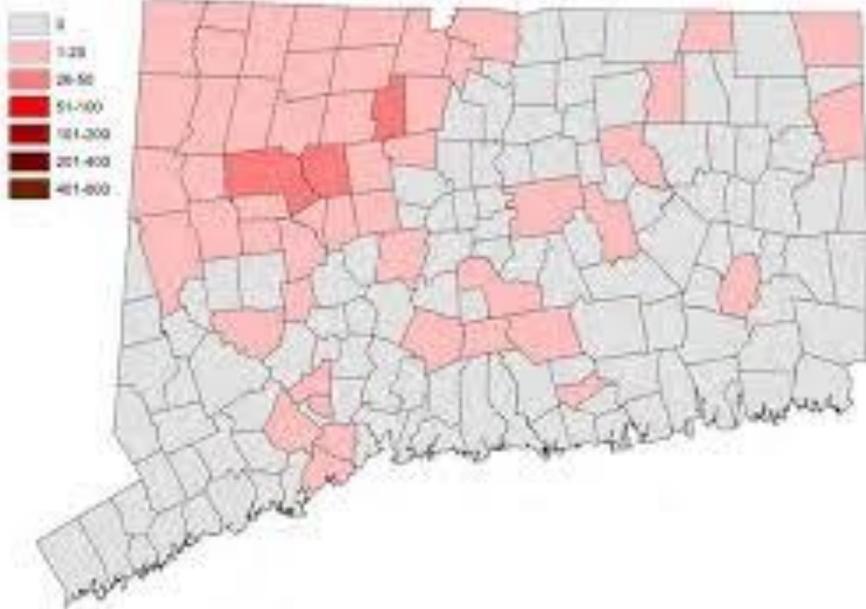
- Threats to both humans and bears
- An overall increase in human bear interactions

Traditional Dispersal and Current Trends

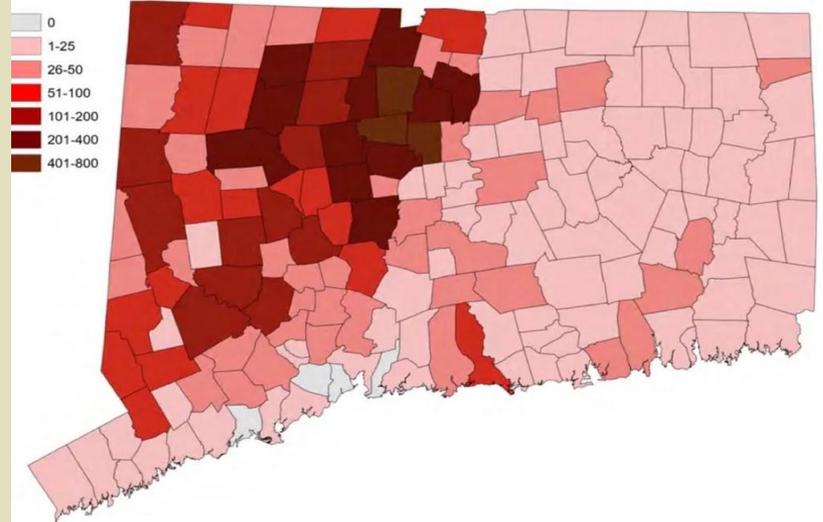


Traditional Dispersal and Current Trends

SIGHTINGS 1999



SIGHTINGS 2023

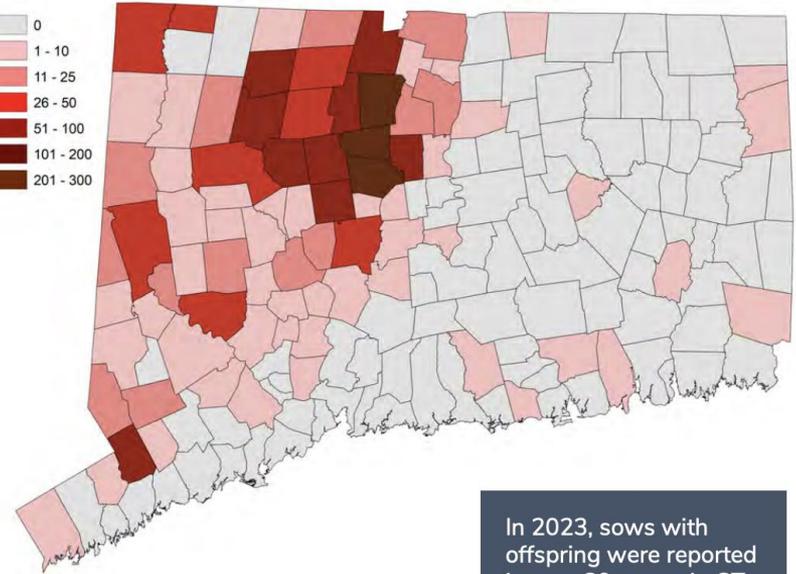


Traditional Dispersal and Current Trends

SOW WITH OFFSPRING 1999



SOW WITH OFFSPRING 2023



In 2023, sows with offspring were reported in over 80 towns in CT.

Black Bear Growth and Dispersal:

- Black bears are increasingly moving into residential areas and downstate regions.

Role of Environmental Organizations:

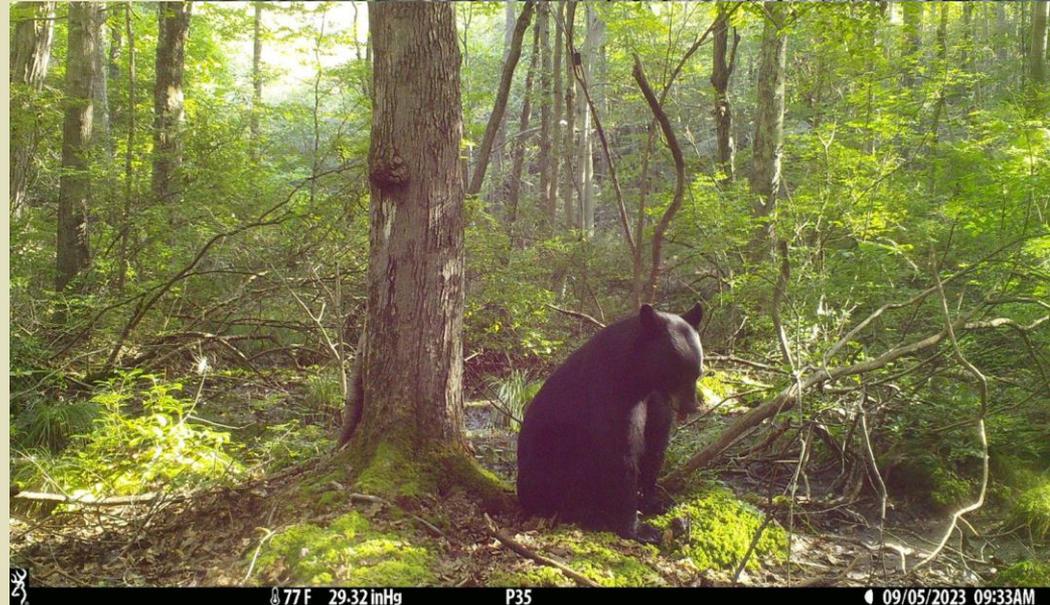
- Organizations like H2H (Hudson to Housatonic) are working to understand bear population density, dispersal, and behavior.
- Educating the public about how to safely interact with their new "neighbors."

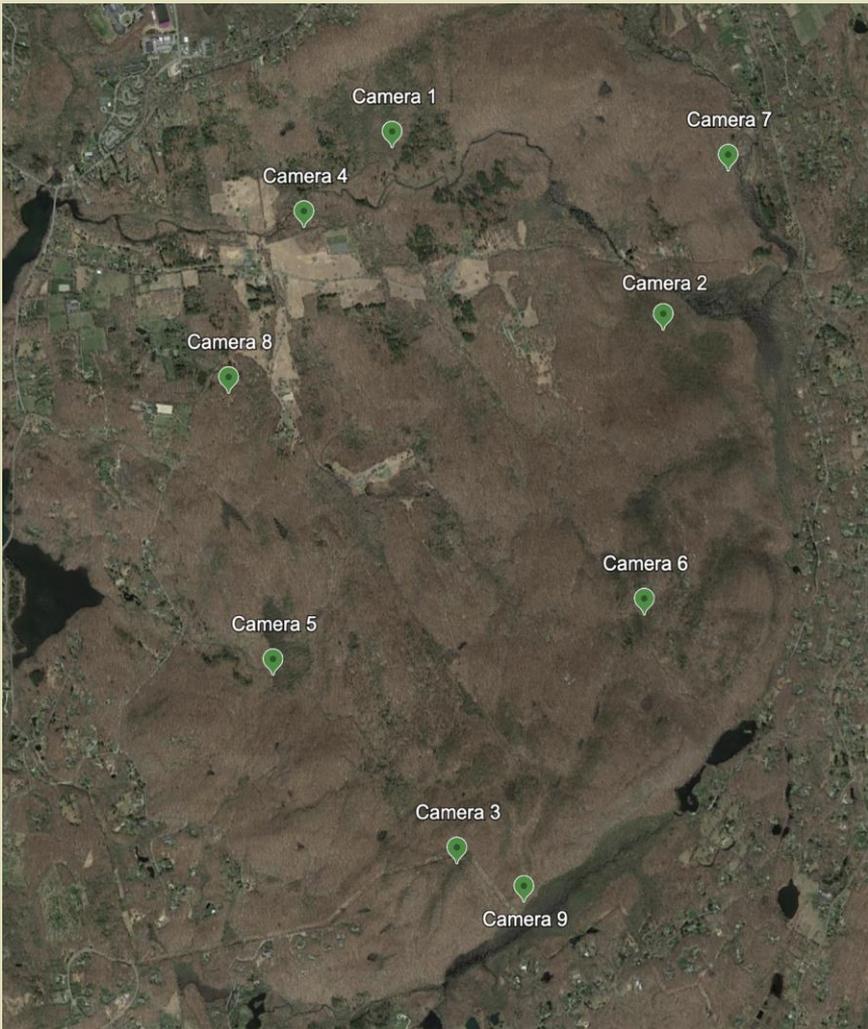
My Involvement:

- Since 2023, I have been deploying cameras in Ward Pound Ridge and other county properties.
- Which helps organizations like H2H create more accurate population models and dispersal maps.
- The goal is to capture "events" involving black bears to better understand their behavior, dispersal patterns, population density, and corridors of travel.

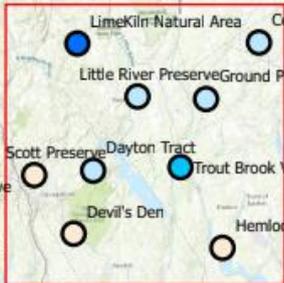
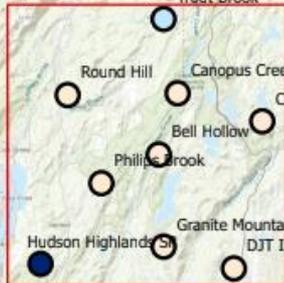
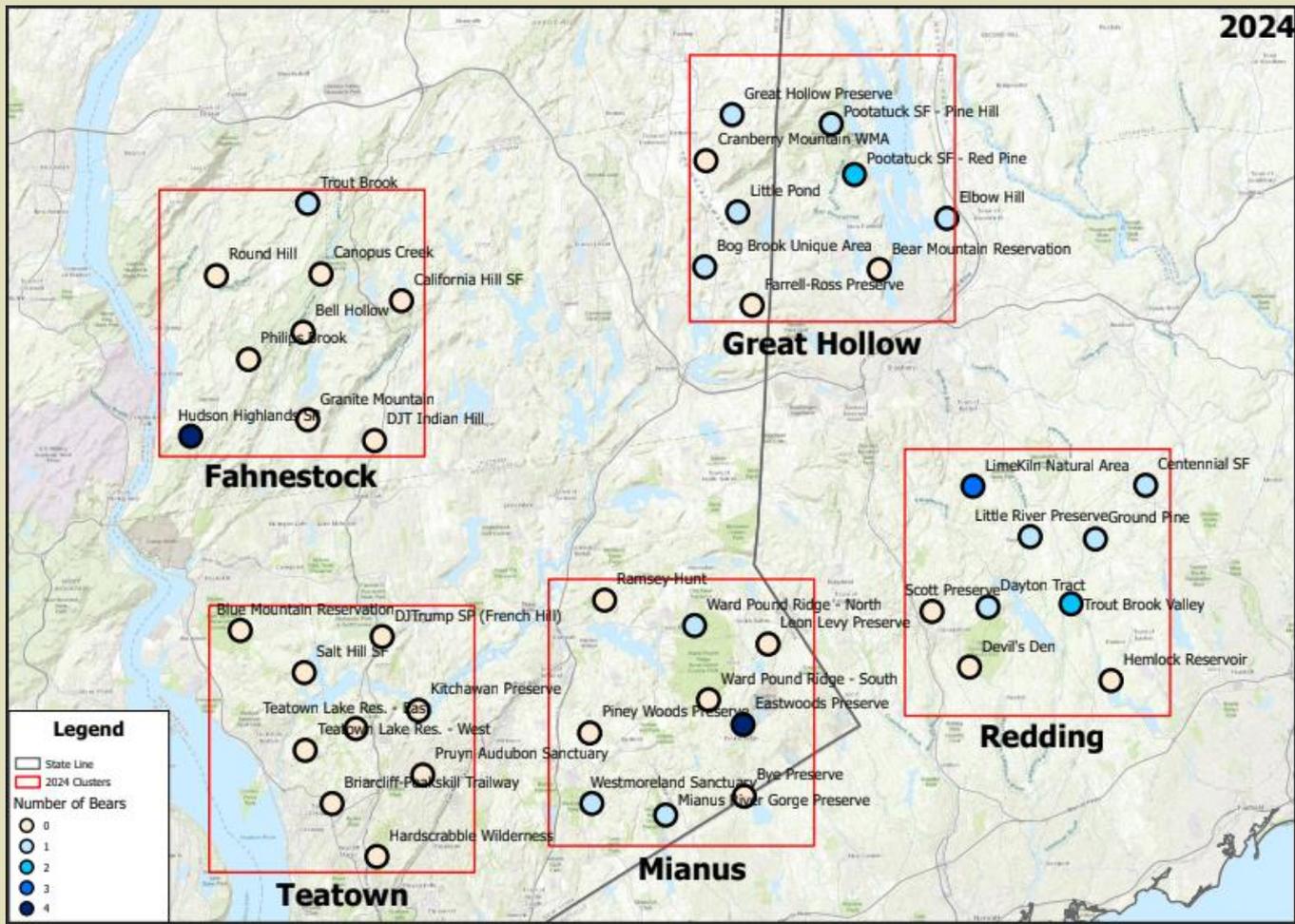
Camera Setup and Baits Used:

- **Close range smell based attractants**
- **Baits:**
 - Black anise paste (considered the most effective).
 - Salmon oil.
 - Strawberry extract.
 - Predator disk
 - Hickory smoke
- **Camera set up and checks**
 - Two weeks between checks
 - Four weeks between baiting









Legend

- State Line
- 2024 Clusters

Number of Bears

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

Conflicts on Trails

- **Bear Behavior on Trails**
 - Bears often use trails to avoid exerting too much energy, as trails are **easier to traverse** and burn fewer calories.
 - Bears may be distracted accidentally encounter hikers around corners or while traveling the trail.

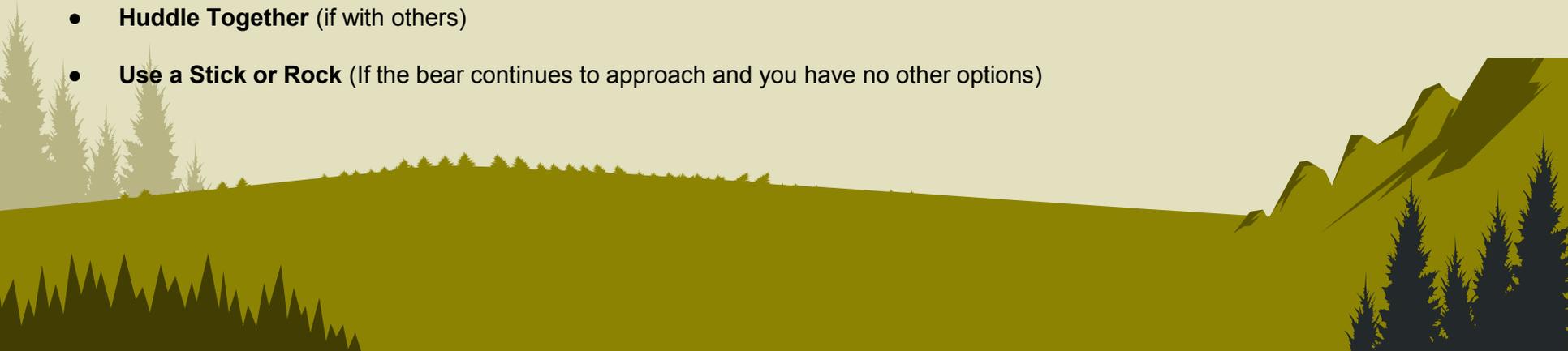
- **When Bear Encounters Are Most Likely**
 - **Early morning** and **evening** are peak times for bear encounters.
 - **Joggers** are at higher risk

- **How to Reduce the Risk of Bear Encounters**
 - **Make your presence known:** Talk to one another or make noise to alert bears of your presence.
 - **Hike in groups:** Bears are more likely to avoid groups of people.
 - **Avoid hiking during crepuscular hours:** Bears are most active during dawn and dusk.
 - **Stay aware of your surroundings:** Be alert for signs of bear activity (tracks, droppings, etc.).



Resolving Conflicts on Trail

- **Give the Bear Space, and a way out**
- **Ensure the bear that you are not a threat**
- **Use a Loud, Commanding Voice to try to “scare” the bear away**
- **Back Up Slowly, while calling the bear and watching bear movements and behaviors, and maintaining eye contact:**
 - Running can cause a predatory reaction from the bear. You can't outrun or outclimb a bear
- **Keep Dogs on Leashes and under control**
- **Huddle Together** (if with others)
- **Use a Stick or Rock** (If the bear continues to approach and you have no other options)



Bear-Human Conflicts at Home

Primary Cause of Negative Interactions/Conflicts with Bears:

- Bears are naturally driven by hunger and a search for food. When they encounter human food they may initially be cautious but are drawn in by the caloric value of the food.
- Habituation to People and Human Developments:

Habituation Process:

- Gradual exposure to people no longer causes stress or fear, especially since many people do not haze bears.
- Continued access to food causes bears to associate people and human developments with food.
- The promise of food, combined with the lack of significant threats, causes bears to become bolder and venture further into human areas in search of food.

Dangers to Both Bears and People:

- Bears are often euthanized if they progress to entering homes or other buildings in search of food.
- Although bears are not inherently violent, they may lash out if they feel cornered or stressed.



Removing Attractants

Birdfeeders:

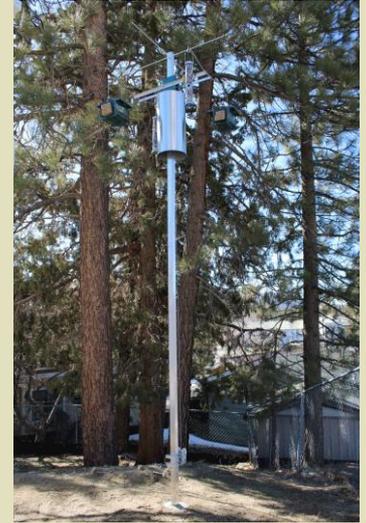
- On metal pole or clothes line out of bears reach
- Higher than 10 feet
- Take down feeders in summer months or all together.

Trash or waste:

- Properly dispose of food waste
- Remove pet waste
- Bear proof trash cans
- Cleaning trash cans or cover smell of waste with cleaning supplies(bleach/ lysol)

Backyard chickens:

- Make sure they are put away at early and late hours of the day.



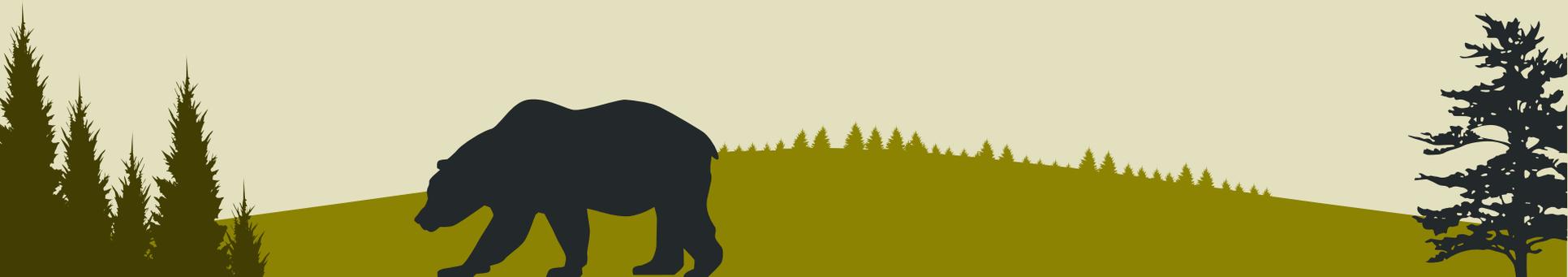
Hazing

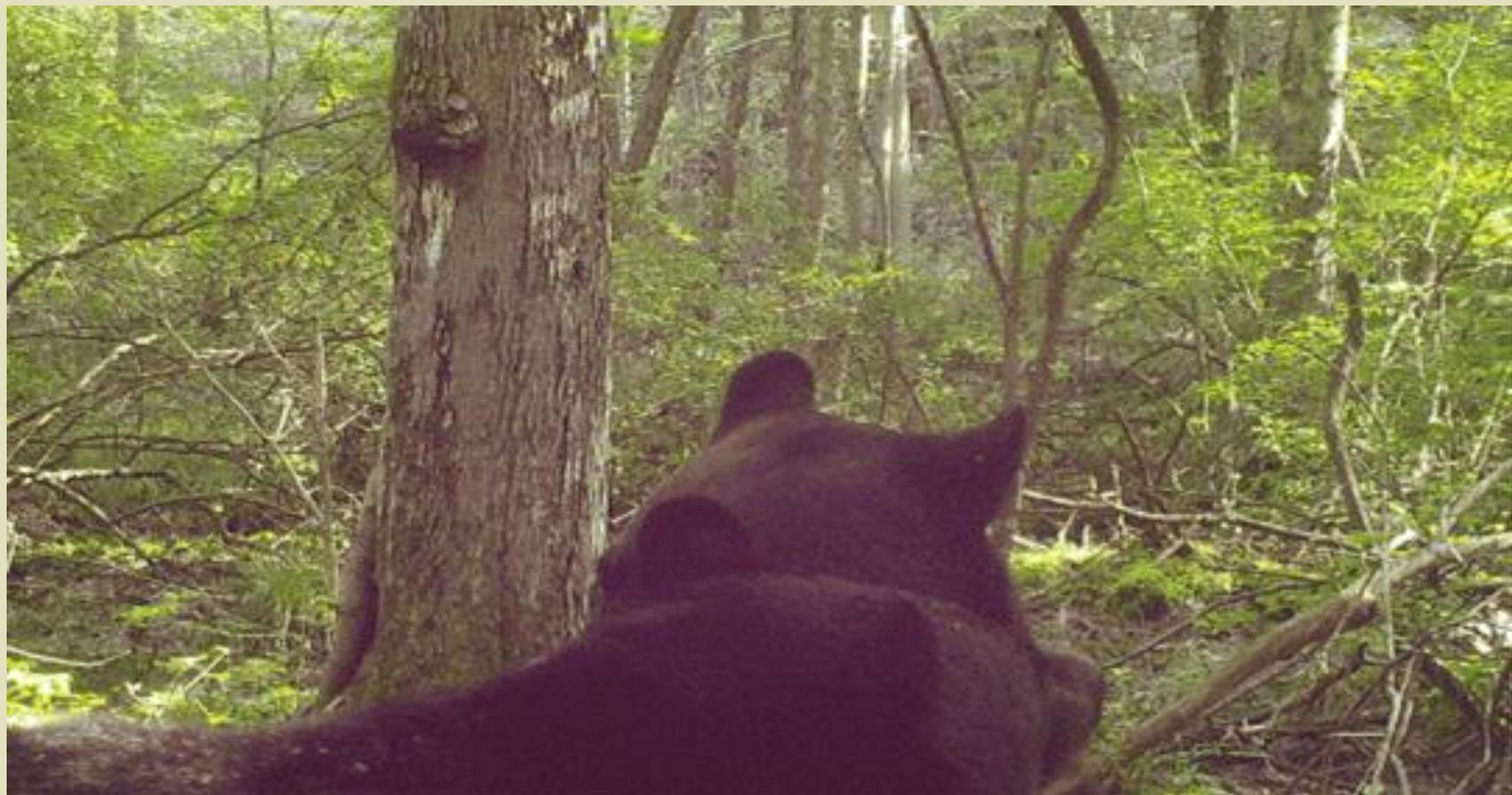
If a bear approaches your house, it's crucial to deter it while maintaining a safe distance.

Effective methods for scaring the bear include:

- Clanging pots and pans together
- Firecrackers
- Setting off an airhorn

These actions create a negative experience for the bear, instilling fear and discouraging future visits to your home or others in the area.





Resources

NY DEC Region 3

- Sighting/ damages 845-256-3098
- Possible danger: 844-332-3267



Mianus River Gorge

- Budd@Mianus.org
- iNaturalist app> “Hudson to Housatonic Bears”



CT DEEP West Region

- Sighting/ damages 860-424-3011
- Possible danger: 860-424-3333



Works Cited

Black Bear Range. North American Bear Center. (2023, March 28). <https://bear.org/bear-facts/black-bear-range/>

Black Bear. CT.gov. (n.d.). <https://portal.ct.gov/deep/wildlife/fact-sheets/black-bear>

Parks, N. Y. S. (2016, January 21). *Between sleeping & waking: Female black bears in Wintertime*. New York State Parks and Historic Sites Blog. <https://nystateparks.blog/2016/01/19/neither-asleep-nor-awake-female-black-bears-in-wintertime/>

