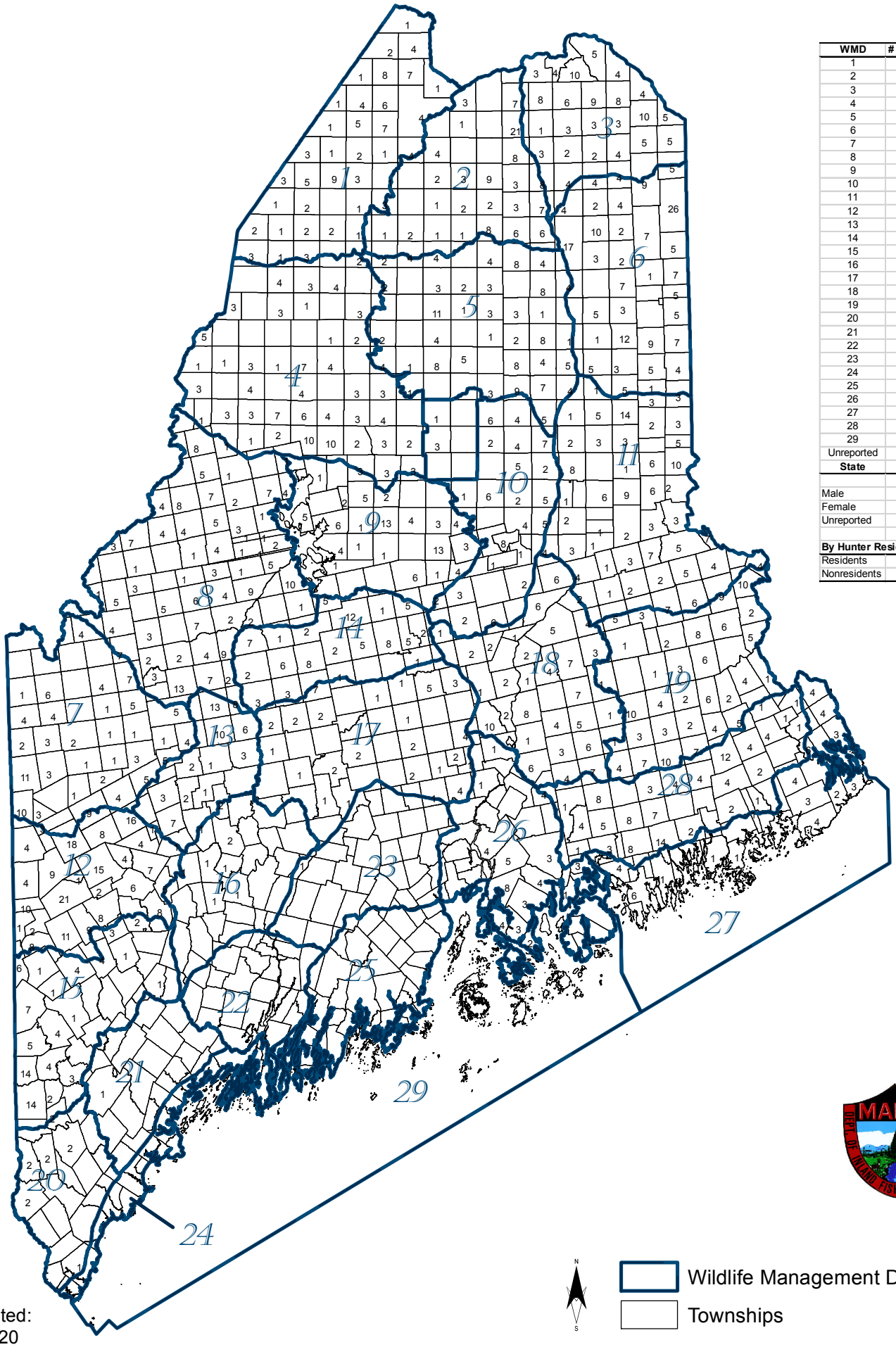
2019 Bear Harvest by Town



WMD	# of Bears
1	101
2	92
3	152
4	147
5	124
6	183
7	119
8	214
9	85
10	77
11	180
12	168
13	58
14	71
15	82
16	8
17	49
18	118
19	121
20	11
21	2
22	0
23	0
24	0
25	0
26	42
27	41
28	125
29	0
Unreported	0
State	**2,370**

Male	1,394
Female	976
Unreported	0

By Hunter Residence	
Residents	903
Nonresidents	1,467

Map created:
1/27/2020

2019 Maine Black Bear Harvest

The general hunting season for black bears opens the last Monday in August and closes the last Saturday in November. Hunters are allowed to hunt bears near natural food sources or by still-hunting throughout the entire three-month season. The bear trapping season continues to span two months opening on September 1 and closing on October 31. Hunting over bait is permitted during the first four weeks of the season (August 26-September 21, 2019). The hound season overlaps the last two weeks of the bait season and continues through the following four weeks. Starting in 2015, youth hunters are permitted to hunt the Saturday prior to the opening of the season. This year, 21 youth hunters shot a bear on youth day.

Natural food abundance varies from year to year and influences harvest levels. Since 2005, harvests have declined below objectives with between 2,400 to 3,486 bears harvested annually. This fall, natural foods were particularly abundant resulting in one of the lowest harvests in recent years. Although only 2,370 bears were harvested, this year's harvest provided approximately 190,000 pounds of bear meat to hunters and their families. Although most bears (95%) continue to be harvested with the use of bait, dogs, or traps, the abundance of natural foods led to low interest in bait. As a result, 1,547 bears were harvested over bait accounting for only 65% of the harvest. Another 579 bears were taken by hunters using trained bear dogs accounting for 24% of the harvest, and 137 bears were taken in traps (6%). Only 5% were taken by other methods: 81 bears were harvested by deer hunters and 26 by spot/stalk or still-hunting. The majority of bears (82%) continue to be harvested earlier in the season with 1,941 bears harvested before the end of September. Hunters can take two bears if one is taken by trapping and the other by hunting. This year, 27 hunters/trappers harvested two bears.

Geographic Distribution of the Harvest

In 2019, bears were harvested in 12 of the state's 16 counties and in 24 of 29 WMDs. Although the greatest harvest occurred in Aroostook County (684 bears, 29% of total harvest), the density of harvest, expressed as the number of bears killed per 100 square miles of habitat (forested land), remains greatest in portions of northern, western and eastern Maine with between 17 and 19 bears/100 mi^2 harvested in WMDs 3, 6, 12, and 28. Fewer bears were taken in southern portions of the State. Between one and five bears were harvested in Androscoggin, Cumberland, and Kennebec counties and less than four bears/100 mi^2 were harvested in WMD 16 20, and 21. In all other WMDs, hunters harvested between four and 12 bears/100 mi^2. The statewide average of nine bears/100 mi^2 was also low. No bears were taken in Knox, Lincoln, Sagadahoc, and Waldo counties and in WMDs 22-25 and 29.

Residence of Successful Hunters

Maine's reputation for producing high-quality bear hunting was again reflected in the distribution of the harvest by hunter residency. Visitors to Maine killed 1,467 bears (62%) of the 2,370 bears tagged during 2019. Non-resident hunters shot more of the bears (66%) taken over bait and with the use of hounds (70%). Hunting over bait remained popular among resident hunters with 58% of successful resident hunters taking their bear over bait. Although fewer bears were taken during the deer season, in traps, or by spot and stalk methods, Maine residents accounted for the majority (89%, 83%, and 85% respectively) of the bears taken during those seasons.

Assistance by Registered Maine Guides

In 2019, guides assisted 240 residents (27%) and 1,343 non-residents (92%) with their successful hunts. Assistance by guides accounted for 85% of bears harvested with trained bear dogs, 68% of the bears taken over bait, 24% of trapped bears, 2% of bears taken while deer hunting, and 12% of bears taken by spot/stalk/still-hunt methods.

Sex and Age Distribution of the Harvest

Males made up 59% (1,394 bears) of the 2019 harvest. Adult bears accounted for 96% (2,273 bears) of the harvest.

Prospects for the 2020 season

Since 1997, the Department has adopted a generic bear season framework to maintain consistent hunting periods. However, bear hunting regulations can be modified in response to changes in Maine's bear population or other management concerns. The 2020 season will remain similar to recent years, opening with a youth day the last Saturday in August. The general season will open the following Monday and will close the last Saturday in November. Successful hunts are influenced by a variety of factors, but natural food availability is often the most influential. In years with an abundance of soft or hard mast crops, hunters hunting over bait experience lower success while deer hunters and hunters that pursue bears with hounds have additional opportunity as bears remain out foraging on abundant food crops longer than in years with poor food abundance. Based on past alternate cycles in natural food abundance, we anticipate that the 2020 season will provide more opportunity for hunters to take a bear.