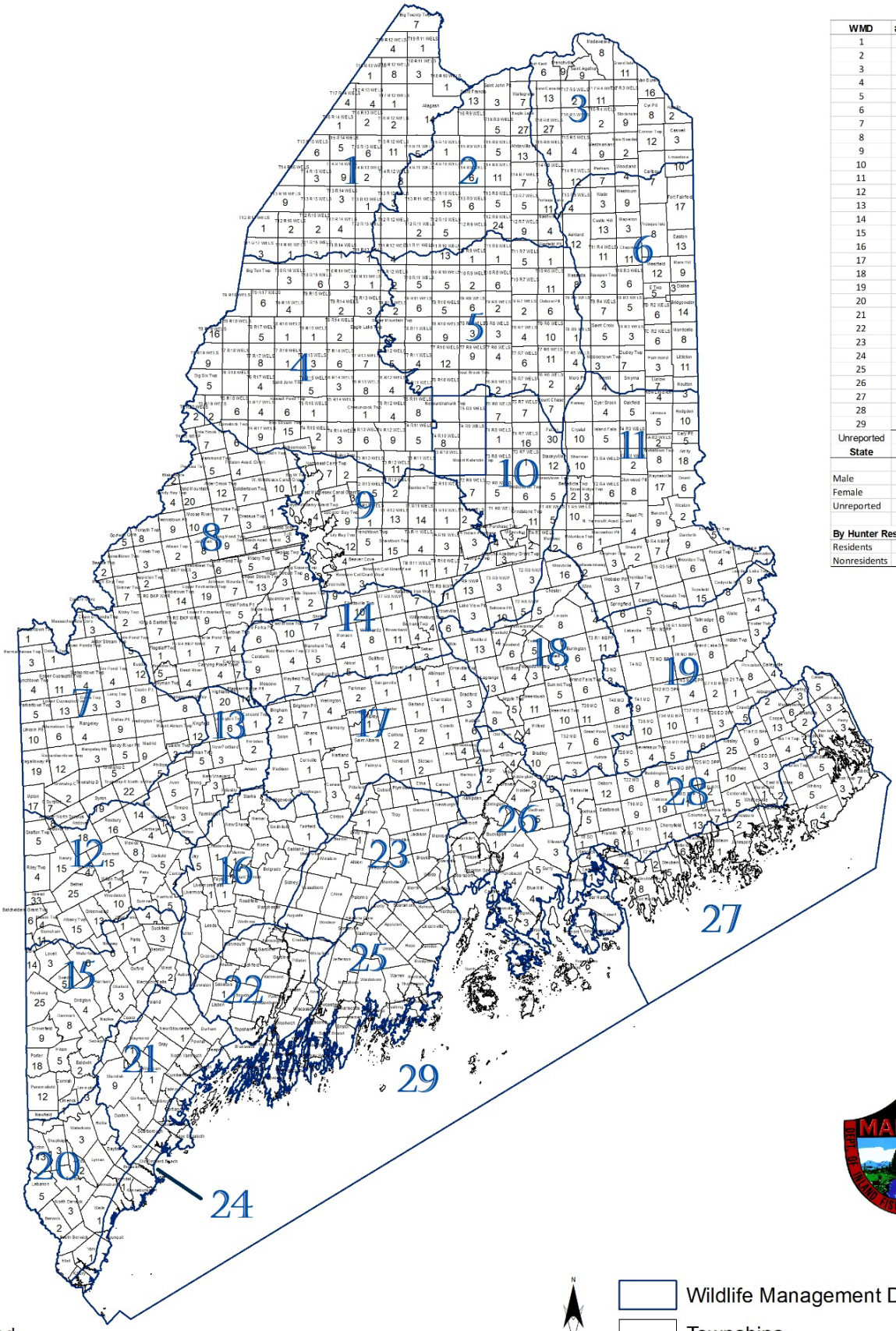
2022 Bear Harvest by Town



WMD	# of Bears
1	130
2	178
3	218
4	227
5	193
6	265
7	234
8	355
9	160
10	158
11	254
12	243
13	69
14	97
15	136
16	10
17	70
18	233
19	128
20	43
21	15
22	1
23	4
24	0
25	0
26	59
27	78
28	201
29	0
Unreported	2
State	**3,761**
Male	2,054
Female	1,707
Unreported	0
By Hunter Residence	
Residents	1,410
Nonresidents	2,351

Wildlife Management Districts

Townships

Map created:
06/16/2023

Maine's 2022 Black Bear Season

The general hunting season for black bears opens the last Monday in August and closes the last Saturday in November. Hunters can hunt bears near natural food sources or by still-hunting throughout the entire 3-month season. The bear trapping season spans 2 months opening on September 1 and closing on October 31. Hunting over bait is permitted during the first 4 weeks of the season (August 29-September 24, 2022). The hound season overlaps the last two weeks of the bait season and continues through the following five weeks (September 12-October 28, 2022). Most bears are harvested during the first month of the season and with the use of bait, dogs, or traps. Only 3% are harvested by spot/stalk or still-hunting or by deer hunters during the November firearm season. Starting in 2015, youth hunters were permitted to hunt the Saturday prior to the opening of the season and since 2008, hunters can take two bears if one is taken by trapping and the other by hunting. During the 2022 season, 52 youth hunters shot a bear on youth day, a near record high, and 47 hunters harvested 2 bears (twice the average for three years in a row).

Natural food abundance varies from year to year and can have a strong influence on final harvest. This fall, we expected poorer natural foods crops and higher harvest. Although a lower percentage of bears were harvested over bait (67%), this did not equate to a lower bear harvest. In fact, the 2022 harvest reached a near record high of 3,761 likely in response to higher hunter participation (~13,500 bear permits) and record high harvest by hound hunters (903 bears) and trappers (295 bears). Natural food levels also influence bear harvest by deer hunters. In years of higher food abundance, bears stay out foraging longer providing deer hunters greater opportunity to harvest a bear. This year's harvest of 23 bears during the November deer season indicates that natural foods were low causing bears to enter dens early.

Geographic Distribution of the Harvest

In 2022, bears were harvested in 13 of the state's 16 counties and in 26 of 29 WMDs. Although the highest harvest occurred in Aroostook County (1,011 bears, 27% of total harvest), the density of harvest, expressed as the number of bears killed per 100 square miles of forested land, remains greatest in portions of northern, western and eastern Maine with between 25 and 28 bears/100 mi^2 harvested in WMDs 3, 6, 12, and 28. Fewer bears were taken in southern portions of the State with only 2 to 19 bears harvested in Androscoggin, Cumberland, Kennebec, and Waldo counties and less than five bears/100 mi^2 harvested in WMD 16, 20, 22, and 29. In all other WMDs, hunters harvested between 6 and 19 bears/100 mi^2. No bears were taken in Knox, Lincoln and Sagadahoc counties and in WMD 24, 25 and 29. The statewide average of 14 bears/100 mi^2 was higher than average.

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 2,351 bears (63%) of the 3,761 bears tagged during 2022. Non-resident hunters shot more of the bears (65%) taken over bait and with the use of hounds (74%). However, hunting over bait remained popular among resident hunters with 62% 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 (91%, 80%, and 84% respectively) taken during those seasons.

Assistance by Registered Maine Guides

In 2022, guides assisted 387 residents (28%) and 2,152 non-residents (92%) with their successful hunts. Assistance by guides accounting for 88% of bears harvested with trained bear dogs, 67% of the bears taken over bait, 23% of trapped bears, 9% of bears taken by spot/stalk/still-hunt methods, and none of the bears taken while deer hunting.

Sex and Age Distribution of the Harvest

Males made up 55% (2,054 bears) of the 2022 harvest. Adult bears accounted for 94% (3,522 bears) of the harvest.

Prospects for the 2023 season

Since 1997, the Department has adopted a generic bear season framework to maintain consistent hunting periods. However, regulations can be modified in response to changes in the bear population or other management concerns. The 2023 season will remain the same, opening with a youth day the last Saturday in August and closing the last Saturday in November. Successful hunts are influenced by a variety of factors, but natural food levels are often the most influential. When soft or hard mast crops are abundant, hunters hunting over bait experience lower success while deer hunters and hunters that pursue bears with hounds have greater opportunity as bears remain out foraging longer when natural food is abundant. Based on past alternate cycles in natural foods, we anticipate that the 2023 season will provide less opportunity to take a bear with the aid of bait and overall lower harvest but more opportunity to hunt over natural food sources or harvest a bear later in the season with bears entering the dens later.