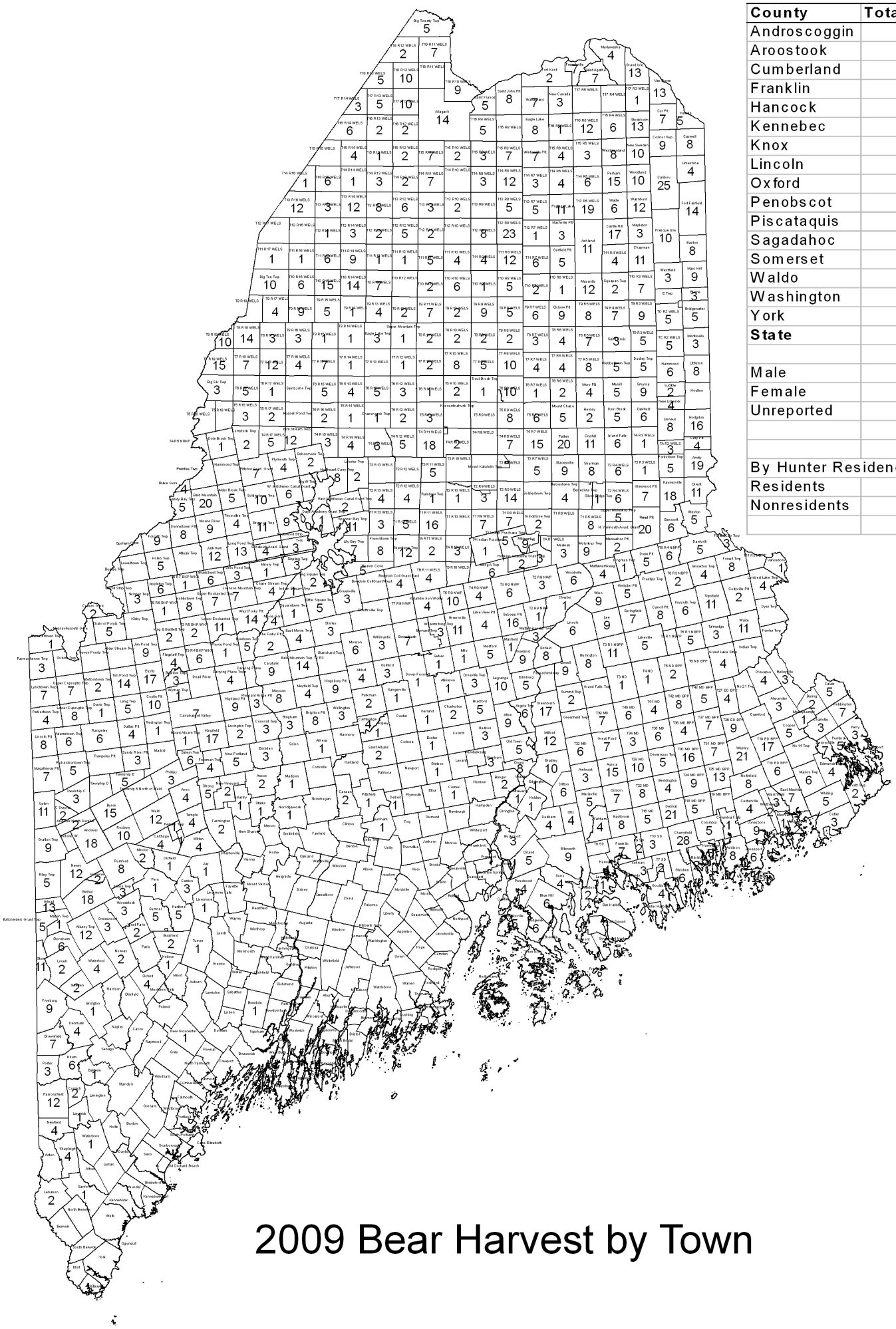

2009 Bear Harvest by Town

County	Total
Androscoggin	2
Aroostook	1048
Cumberland	3
Franklin	167
Hancock	184
Kennebec	0
Knox	0
Lincoln	0
Oxford	293
Penobscot	452
Piscataquis	415
Sagadahoc	1
Somerset	487
Waldo	1
Washington	406
York	27
State	**3486**
Male	1953
Female	1501
Unreported	32
By Hunter Residence	
Residents	1278
Nonresidents	2208

Maine's 2009 Black Bear Season

The general hunting season for black bear in 2009 opened August 31 and closed November 28. Hunters were allowed to hunt bears near natural food sources or by still-hunting throughout this 3-month period. Hunting over bait was permitted from August 31 through September 26. The hound season overlapped the bait season, opening September 14 and closing October 30. The bear trapping season opened September 1 and closed October 31.

Following 4 years of a harvest just below 3,000 bears, the 2009 harvest of 3,486 bears marks the return to previous harvest levels. In 2009, 2,935 bears were taken over bait (84%), 329 bears were taken by hound hunters (9%), 72 bears were taken in traps (2%), 85 were taken by unreported methods (2%), and 65 bears (2%) were harvested by deer hunters. Most bears were taken early in the season, with 3,243 bears (93%) harvested before the end of September. When fall foods are less abundant, as they were this year, bears enter dens earlier providing less hunting opportunity to deer hunters. This year, Maine deer hunters harvested fewer bears than last year (65 vs. 155).

Geographic Distribution of the Harvest

Bears were harvested in 27 Wildlife Management Districts (WMDs). No bears were taken in WMDs 21, and 22. The density of harvest expressed as the number of bears killed per 100 square miles of habitat (forested land) was greatest in WMD 28 at 28 bears/100 mi^2 followed closely by WMDs 3 an 6 with 23 and 22 bears harvested/100 mi^2. In all other WMDs, hunters harvested less than 20 bears/100 mi^2 (statewide average of 12bears/100 mi^2). Bears were harvested in 13 of the state's 16 counties. Most bears (1,048) were harvested in Aroostook county accounting for 30% of the harvest. No bears were taken in Kennebec, Knox and Lincoln counties and <5 bears were taken in Androscoggin, Cumberland, Sagadahoc and Waldo counties.

Residence of Successful Hunters

Maine's reputation for producing high-quality bear hunting is reflected in the harvest distribution by hunter residency. Visitors to Maine killed 2,208 bears (63%) of the 3,486 bears tagged during 2009. Non-resident hunters shot most of the bears (66%) taken over bait and with the use of hounds (65%), although bait hunting remains popular amongst resident hunters with 78% of successful resident hunters taking their bear over bait. Although few bears are taken during the deer season or in traps, Maine residents accounted for the majority (91% and 81%, respectively) of the bears taken during those seasons.

Assistance by Registered Maine Guides

In 2009, guides helped take 82% of bears harvested over hounds, 68% of the bears taken over bait, 27% of trapped bears, 32% of the bears for which method of take was unreported, and 2% of the bears taken by deer hunters. Guides assisted 269 residents (23%) and 1,954 nonresidents (91%) with their successful hunts in 2008.

Sex and Age Distribution of the Harvest

Males made up 56% (1,953 bears) of the 2009 harvest. Adult bears accounted for 92% (3,218 bears) of the harvest and sex and age were not reported for an additional 32 bears (1%).

Prospects for the 2010 season

The Department has adopted a generic bear season framework to maintain consistent hunting periods, unless management concerns require changes to the lengths of hunting or trapping periods. In 2010, the season will remain similar to those in recent years. Under our current bear season framework, the season begins on the last Monday in August and closes on the last Saturday in November, generally a 13-week period (August 30-November 27, 2010).

Current population models indicated that Maine's black bear population can sustain a harvest of up to 15% of the population. Our current bear season framework and past hunter participation rates provides the opportunity for hunters to stabilize Maine's bear population with a harvest between 2,300 and 3,500 bears. Our population estimate of 23,000 bears is a conservative estimate, especially given recent high cub numbers and cub survival rates. Over the last several years, we have been collecting new information to update our population estimates including equipping a sample of bears with GPS collars and collecting teeth from harvested black bears. In the next couple of years, we should have sufficient information to update our population estimate and modify hunting seasons if necessary to meet current management objectives (i.e., stabilize the bear population).