

Nearly 300 bears killed in controversial Florida hunt

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Florida's bear population has reached an estimated number of 3,000, having grown from just several hundred in the 1970s

Hunters in Florida over the weekend killed some 300 black bears as part of a controversial program allowing sportsmen to track and kill the animals, wildlife officials said Monday.

Florida's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission sold thousands of permits to sportsmen taking part in the sanctioned [hunt](#), which aimed to help keep the state's growing bear population in check.

The hunt was the first allowed in Florida since 1994, when the practice of killing bears was outlawed.

By mid-morning Friday, the state had sold nearly 4,000 bear hunting permits—more than Florida's estimated bear population.

Officials had said the hunt would last for as long as seven days, but cut it short late Sunday as they approached the predetermined quota of 320 culled [black bears](#).

Wildlife officials said that since the 1970s, Florida's bear population has grown from several hundred to more than 3,000.

The hunt held Saturday and Sunday in designated parts of the state was open to sportsmen using firearms or archery equipment.

Officials imposed a limit of one bear per hunter and said bear cubs weighing less than 100 pounds (45 kilograms) could not be hunted.

Officials said that over the years there have been a growing number of encounters—including some that proved fatal to people—in which bears have encroached upon areas inhabited by humans.

Animal rights activists protested the hunt as cruel and branded those taking part as "trophy hunters."

"This hunt is completely unnecessary and it's not supported by science or by public sentiment," said Kate MacFall, Florida state director for the Humane Society of the United States, a leading animal rights group.

"Research overwhelmingly shows that hunting bears in the woods doesn't reduce problems with bears in neighborhoods," she said.

"The state would be better off helping citizens manage trash and outdoor food sources," said MacNall.

"Unfortunately for bears, most of Florida's wildlife commissioners failed to listen to the overwhelming majority of Floridians who publicly opposed the hunt."

State officials said permits from the hunt netted some \$376,900, which would be used for trash management and other efforts to limit interactions between [bears](#) and humans.

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