

Critics: Florida bear hunt 'ignored science'

Some limits reached by end of first day

BY DAVID SHIFFMAN
THE WASHINGTON POST

Florida's controversial black bear hunt ended Sunday, just two days into a season that was supposed to last a week. The total of 298 bears killed by hunters was so close to the proposed weeklong limit of 320 that the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission decided to end the hunt. In fact, the number of bears killed in some parts of the state had already passed regional limits by the end of the first day.

This weekend was the first time that black bears have been hunted in Florida since 1994, and the hunt drew strong criticism from conservation groups and from tens of thousands of concerned citizens.

"Opponents came from a variety of viewpoints," said Craig Pitman, who has covered environmental issues for Florida's largest newspaper, the Tampa Bay Times, since 1998. "Some were opposed to all hunting. Some opposed hunting bears but didn't object to hunting alligators, deer and so forth. Some said they could not support a hunt unless the state could

say for sure how many bears there were to start with, which at this point it cannot."

Indeed, there has not been a statewide scientific population assessment of black bears since 2002, but according to Thomas Eason, the FWC's director of habitat and species conservation, a study currently underway suggests that bear populations have increased in some parts of Florida.

Opponents were critical of the incomplete scientific data used to support the hunt.

Adam Sugalski, the campaign director for "Stop the Florida Bear Hunt," called the bear hunt "undemocratic, unscientific, and immoral." The Florida chapter director of Humane Society of the United States wrote that the FWC's reasoning for the bear hunt "ignores science," noting that black bears were listed on Florida's Endangered and Threatened Species List as recently as 2012. A state judge who denied an injunction to stop the hunt agreed that much of the science that FWC was using to justify it was weak.

Eason, however, believes

that the available data supports the need for a hunt.

"Bear populations have increased to the point where FWC must now manage that success using a range of tools," Eason said. "Regulated hunting has a long successful history of contributing to conservation in North America. Of the 41 states with resident bear populations, 33 of them conduct hunts, and in most cases hunting has occurred for decades."

In a statement showing remarkable disregard for wildlife conservation from the head of an agency whose name contains the words "wildlife conservation," Richard Corbett, the former head of the FWC who approved the plan to hunt black bears, said of critics that:

"Those people don't know what they're talking about. Most of those people have never been in the woods. They think we're talking about teddy bears: 'Oh Lord, don't hurt my little teddy bear!' Well, these bears are dangerous."

Despite Corbett's suggestion that killing black bears would make people safer, a later statement from the FWC states that this is not



ADAM SUGALSKI

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the purpose of the bear hunt, and that hunting is not an effective way to reduce bear-human conflicts.

Indeed, there are many non-lethal strategies that effectively mitigate conflicts between bears and people, including things as simple as garbage cans that seal more tightly so that the smell doesn't attract bears.

"If there are not too many bears in the woods, and conflicts with humans in suburbia can be almost completely solved with simple changes in human behavior, why is the state authorizing the killing of 320 bears?" Sugalski asked.

The FWC is currently planning on making the black bear hunt an annual

event. However, Eason notes that "the hunt is just one component of FWC's overall bear conservation strategy, and FWC will continue to invest much staff time and resources in efforts such as outreach and education, waste management, and removing bears that pose a threat to human safety."

The case for year-round daylight saving time

BY CHRISTOPHER INGRAHAM
THE WASHINGTON POST

Making daylight saving time permanent — by never "falling back" again — could save the country billions a year in social costs by reducing rapes and robberies that take place in the evening hours, according to a forthcoming paper by researchers at the Brookings Institution and Cornell University.

In 2007, Congress increased the period of daylight saving time by four weeks, adding three weeks in the spring and one in the fall. "This produced a useful natural experiment for our paper," authors Jennifer Doleac and Nicholas Sanders write at Brookings, "which helped us isolate the effect of daylight from other seasonal factors that might affect crime." They found that "when DST begins in the spring, robbery rates for the entire day fall an average of 7 percent, with a much larger 27 percent drop during the evening hour that gained

The big savings in crime and social cost outlined in the new Brookings paper gives a powerful empirical case for permanent DST

some extra sunlight."

The mechanism that might cause this drop is fairly simple: "Most street crime occurs in the evening around common commuting hours of 5 to 8 p.m.," the authors write, "and more ambient light during typical high-crime hours makes it easier for victims and passers-by to see potential threats and later identify wrongdoers."

Moreover, according to the paper, the drop in crime during evening hours wasn't accompanied by a rise in crime during the morning hours. Criminals aren't morning people, as it turns out. In addition to the decrease in robbery rates, the researchers found "suggestive evidence" of a decrease in the incidence of rape during the evening hours, as well.

Every crime carries a social cost — direct economic losses suffered by the vic-

tim, including medical costs and lost earnings; government funds spent on police protection, legal services and incarceration; opportunity costs from criminals choosing not to participate in the legal economy; and indirect losses like pain and suffering. Previous estimates have put the total social cost of a single robbery at roughly \$42,000, and the cost of a rape at \$240,000. Tally it all up, and the three-week DST extension in the Spring of 2007 saved the country \$246 million, according to Doleac and Sanders.

"Assuming a linear effect in other months, the implied social savings from a permanent, year-long change in ambient light would be almost 20 times higher," they conclude, or several billion dollars annually. They do caution, however, that this is just an assumption and

that more research would be needed to determine whether the drop in crime from enacting permanent DST would hold true year-round.

This economic argument joins a long litany of other arguments in favor of a permanent DST extension. Changing the clocks in any direction is a major disruption to our daily rhythms, resulting in increased rates of heart attacks, car accidents and work injuries. Year-round DST could potentially save hundreds of lives from a reduction in

traffic accidents. DST also causes people to spend more time outside, resulting in a 10 percent increase in daily calories burned, according to one study.

Stack all of these findings, plus the big savings in crime and social cost outlined in the new Brookings paper, and you have a really powerful empirical case for permanent DST. On the other side of the ledger, it might make life a little bit more difficult for some farmers. People also often cite schoolkids waiting for buses

in the dark as an argument against yearlong DST. But the dangers of standing around in the early morning hours are probably overstated — especially considering, as the Brookings paper shows, that many types of criminals don't seem to be active during these hours.

"Only the government would believe you could cut a foot off the top of a blanket, sew it to the bottom, and have a longer blanket," goes a saying of unknown provenance. It's time to stop cutting that blanket.

Orange pumpkins are so yesterday

BY LINLY LIN
BLOOMBERG

CHICAGO — Since 1999, the Ackerman family of Illinois has been selling the round orange pumpkins that most Americans carve into decorative jack-o'-lanterns every Halloween. But in recent years, the gourds have been getting a lot weirder.

That's by design. While plenty of customers still buy the traditional-looking pumpkins at this time of year, demand has surged for ones with different colors, shapes and deformities — like all pink or white with red veins or covered in bulbous warts. The Ackermans now sell 160 varieties, according to John Ackerman, who planted a few blue pumpkins on a whim 16 years ago hoping to expand the income from the livestock, corn and soybean operations that have been in his family since 1909.

"People would walk up and see that pumpkin and they'd say, 'This is the ugliest thing I've ever seen,'" Ackerman, 54, said by telephone from his 300-acre farm in Morton, Illinois. "And the next words they said were, 'Please give me three of those!'"

Weird-looking or unusually big pumpkins fetch a hefty premium for growers, and seed companies like W. Atlee Burpee & Co. and Rispens Seeds have responded by developing hundreds of new varieties in recent years. The quirkier ones are winning a bigger share of the increasing market for decorative pumpkins in the U.S., said Mohammad Babadoost, a professor of plant pathology at the University of Illinois in Urbana.



HEINZ-PETER BADER | REUTERS

Various kinds of pumpkins, out of some 400 on display grown this season, are pictured in this combination photo at Franzlbauer farm in Hintersdorf, Austria, recently.

Pumpkins "that are unique and different are what the consumers buy first" so their seasonal decorations stand out, said Phil King, marketing communications manager at Rupp Seeds in Wauseon, Ohio. The company sells 78 pumpkin-seed varieties.

While the government doesn't track sales of non-traditional pumpkins, production of all types has surged 31 percent since 2000 to 1.91 billion pounds in 2014, the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates. Carved jack-o'-lanterns remain the most popular use of pumpkins, but they also end up in food like pies, breads, soups and even seasonal beers, the USDA said. Demand tends to surge during the Halloween season, when the harvest is peaking in places like Illinois, the biggest grower at 57 percent of U.S. production.

At Bengtson's Pumpkin Fest in Homer Glen, Illinois, non-traditional pumpkins sell for 59 cents a pound, 20 cents more than traditional

orange ones. Grocers nationwide sold 39.5 million pounds of pumpkins last year at an average of \$2.44 a pound, a price that was up 50 percent from 2011, according to data provided by Nielsen Perishables Group.

Ross Rispens, the third-generation owner of Rispens Seeds Inc. in Beecher, Illinois, says that their company, which has been selling seeds for 87 years, tries out new varieties every year. It now markets more than 75 different kinds of pumpkins, compared with six in 1978, he said.

"The genetics of pumpkins include a lot of interesting shapes and colors," said Peter Zuck, the vegetable-product manager at Johnny's Selected Seeds in Winslow, Maine, which sells 51 varieties, up from 10 two decades ago. "Looking at the parents, you can't predict what the offspring is going to look like. Sometimes it happens by accident. Breeding pumpkins is a kind of beauty contest."

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