

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS BLACK BEARS IN MISSOULA, MONTANA

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Successful wildlife management actions and policies depend on public acceptance. Management actions minimizing human-black bear (*Ursus americanus*) conflicts are controversial, and research that articulates public attitudes in a diversity of situations is often

lacking. Our objectives were to examine public attitudes towards black bear management of residents in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI; where bears and humans coexist) and the city core, i.e., where no bears are present. We also examined the effects of education and information (EI) efforts to minimize human-bear conflicts. Two questionnaires were distributed to residents living in Missoula, Montana before (2004) and after (2008) EI efforts were implemented. Residents living in the city core and the WUI both attracted bears with bird feeders, BBQ grills, and gardens but had significantly different frequencies of available vegetation and garbage. In the WUI, the frequency of available native and non-native vegetative bear food was significantly higher, whereas the frequency of outdoor garbage storage was significantly lower. In 2008, attitudes were not significantly different between residents in the WUI and the city core. The 4 yrs of EI efforts did not alter resident behaviors that produce attractants in the WUI. However, the EI efforts in the WUI did increase support for non-lethal management actions. Managers may be able to use EI efforts to gain support for black bear management actions, but must realize that behaviors producing attractants may be spatially ubiquitous and difficult to modify.