

Black Bear Harvest Summaries and Harvest Sustainability in Southwest Montana from 2013-2023

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This report is a summary of black bear hunter harvest in Region 3 of Southwest Montana between 2013 and 2023 using FWP's mandatory report database data. In the last eleven years, a total of 2,890 bears have been harvested with a mean harvest of 263 bears each year. Hunters harvested more bears on average in spring than fall. Brown-phase bears were more commonly harvested in spring, whereas black-phase bears were more commonly harvested in fall. In the combined seasons, hunters harvested a total of 1,151 brown phase, and 1,189 black phase bears. Non-resident hunters harvested a higher percentage of bears during spring season and a lower percentage of bears in fall. Rifles were the most common weapon type used in harvest of bears at 81.6% of harvest. Archery, and handguns accounted for 16.3% and 1.5% of harvest respectively. Teeth were collected for aging in 2018 and 2019, and 2021-2023. I evaluated if bear harvest has met sustainability metrics (female harvest $\leq 40\%$, average male age ≥ 4 , average female age ≥ 6) in the region since 2013. One hunting district was close to sustainable bear harvest thresholds and will require monitoring. Bear Management Unit 319 (Bridger Mountains) met the criteria for percent female in harvest (42.7%, 95% C.I. = 38.9% - 46.4%), the criteria for female age (average age at harvest is 7.0, 95% C.I. 6-8) and average male age (4.2, 95% C.I. = 3.7 - 4.7). Confidence Intervals overlap what is considered not sustainable and should be closely monitored.