

# Nev. wildlife officials to conduct 'top-to-bottom' review of state bear hunt Friday

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Written by

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## By the numbers

500-plus: Estimated black bear population in Nevada.

10,000-15,000: Estimated bear population in Sierra.

39: Bears killed in three years of hunting.

2,021: Bear hunt applications in 2013.

Source: Nevada Department of Wildlife.

What: Bear Committee, Nevada Wildlife Commission.

When: 8:30 a.m. Friday.

Where: Nevada Department of Wildlife, 1100 Valley Road, Reno.

As ordered by the Legislature, Nevada wildlife officials on Friday are poised to review the state's controversial hunting season for black bears.

A committee of the Nevada Wildlife Commission is scheduled to discuss what is described as a "top-to-bottom" review of the bear hunt, which ended its third season Dec. 31. The full commission is scheduled to potentially set a 2014 hunting season for bears, along with all other animals hunted in Nevada, during a Jan. 31-Feb. 1 meeting in Las Vegas.

"As we committed, we're going to have a full review," said Commissioner Jack Robb of Reno, a member of the bear committee.

Review of the bear hunt after its third season was one outcome of a bill pushed by critics during the 2013 Legislature in a failed attempt to kill the hunt, which began in 2011. Commissioners are scheduled Friday to discuss that legislation, codes and regulations pertinent to the hunt, an analysis of the hunt by state biologists and to recommend action by the full commission.

A proposal prepared by NDOW would continue the hunt in 2014 in a manner identical to last year, department spokesman Chris Healy said. Quotas for the season would be set in May.

During the first three years of the hunt, a maximum of 20 bears per season could be killed but that total was never reached. Since 2011, 39 bears were killed by hunters, with 14 taken in 2013.

According to a report prepared by NDOW bear biologist Carl Lackey, the long-term viability of Nevada's black bear population "appears favorable," with the estimated bear population in the state increasing from about 450 in 2011 to more than 500 today. Nevada's bear population is believed to be part of a larger Sierra population numbering between 10,000 and 15,000 animals.

Bears are common at Lake Tahoe and along the Carson Range as well as mountainous areas to the east including the Virginia Range, Pine Nut Mountains, Pine Grove Hills and the Wassuk and Sweetwater ranges, among others. Many of the bears killed by hunters were taken in the eastern areas. Beginning in 2012 and in concession to hunt critics, commissioners banned bear hunting in the Tahoe Basin.

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Hunt opponent Kathryn Bricker, executive director of NoBearHuntNV and a member of the committee meeting Friday, acknowledges she little hope the wildlife commission could decide to cancel the bear hunt. The current commission, like the Gov. Jim Gibbons-appointed panel that first approved the hunt in 2010, continues to support the hunt despite widespread opposition by the public, Bricker said.

"There's the question 'could we have a hunt,' which can be answered scientifically," Bricker said. "The larger question in all this is should we have a hunt and that question has been avoided."

Throughout the bear hunt debate the wildlife commission has bent to the desires of hunters and "the current commission is still marching to that beat," Bricker said.

If the hunt continues, Bricker would like to see some changes, among them greater protections to ensure bear cubs are not orphaned in the wild. She would also like to see the use of dogs by bear hunters prohibited – an idea already once rejected by commissioners last year.

Robb said that so long as Nevada's bear population is stable and growing, a continued limited hunt is likely justified.

"From all indications, we do have a healthy bear population in the state of Nevada," Robb said, adding that the Department of Wildlife has an effective science-based approach to managing Nevada's bears and other wildlife.

"As long as we can biologically have (a hunt), I think we will probably move forward," Robb said. "We have checks and balances in place that assure we don't upset the apple cart."