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Ministry of Natural Resources

Re: Proposal to update the province's black bear management approach (Bears in Bruce County)

The Bruce County Federation of Agriculture (BCFA) represents the interests and concerns of over 1600 farm families in Bruce County. We advocate on behalf of farm families on agricultural issues and are a dedicated voice of agriculture in the local community.

The BCFA supports efforts to responsibly manage wildlife in rural agriculture areas. We have interviewed several of our members in regards to the proposed changes in **Wildlife Zone C** to affect the bear population in the Bruce Peninsula area. We have discovered the following details:

- The recorded number of black bears may be inaccurate as the Ministry uses information that may not get the most accurate representation of the true population.
- The reporting of incident /contact with black bears are not being fully reported by agricultural communities such as livestock producers, beekeepers and field crop growers.
- Claims are not being made for damages and losses due to red tape, a lack of trust of inspectors filing claims, and that the value of compensation is not worth the time and efforts it takes to make a claim. When incident claims are being considered as a population indicator, it could be inaccurate.
- Trail cameras are being used in beehive areas showing photos and video of multiply different bears in a small area, targeting hives, and demonstrating how bears are learning to defeat protective steps producers take to protect their hives such as electric fences.
- Cattle livestock producers have had newborn calves removed from fields. Black bears will remove the entire bovine calf from the area removing all evidence of the attack. Municipal Inspectors have a tendency to classify the incident as unfounded due to the lack of evidence.
- Crop producers growing oats have areas flattened by black bears, with other wildlife also playing a contributing factor.

The black bears are becoming more complacent around humans which is very concerning. For example; bee producers used to leave human scent around the beehives to frighten and deter the bear from the hives, the human scent has no effect now. The black bears are no longer fearful of human interaction.

The Ministries proposed changes indicate a change to hunting regulations, such as a lottery tag selection. There are fears that the tag lottery would not harvest enough black bear to effectively control the population, leading to a lack of protection in both agricultural and urban areas from these bears.



Another issue is the tags issued to harvest boar only hunts are felt to be problematic as at times it is too difficult to identify boars over sows. Their size can sometimes be an indicator of sex but not always, which can lead to good intentioned hunters harvesting the wrong sex and potentially being investigated and charged for an offence. This impacts the overall effectiveness of the bear hunts.

The timing of the spring hunt can be difficult for hunters depending on if it is an early spring or a late spring depending on the weather. A late spring can mean that bears are still in their dens completing their hibernation cycle, this among other factors may cause an unwanted population growth.

With black bears having to move south due to overpopulation, resource competition, and lack of food supply as well as dominant boars forcing young boars out of breeding areas, the young black bears continue to move south into more populated areas. This increases the potential of negative human contact occurring along with increasing the odds of the black bears taking advantage of agriculture businesses who have no experience with bears or deterrents.

Locally proposed solutions:

- Where the black bears are defeating defense strategies- research what strategies along with electric fences will support producers to stop the black bears aggressive behavior
- Reconsider the hunt proposals as set out- remove the boar only hunt consideration
- Adjust the timing of the spring hunt - timing could be later to allow a responsible and effective harvest
- Consideration of a weeklong fall hunt

Another strategy would be the removal of Red Tape on Compensation Policies. To encourage incident reporting that assist technicians in obtaining a correct picture of the black bear population.

Bruce County Federation of Agriculture and its members would be willing to sit down with Ministry of Natural Resources staff and have an open discussion trying to come up with a responsible Black Bear Population Strategy for the Bruce Peninsula and area.

Regards,

Chris Cossitt
BCFA President

IN UNITY THERE'S STRENGTH