

Fact Sheet

No Spring/Summer Bear Hunting *Vote No on HB 1294 and Brown Amendment to overturn citizen initiative*

House Bill 1294 would overturn the will of voters and allow Colorado bear hunting in the spring and summer for the first time in 19 years. Cubs of mother bears killed during the spring and much of the summer are certain to starve to death.



In 1992, voters overwhelmingly passed Measure 10 to stop bear hounding, killing bears over bait, and in the spring and summer when cubs will be orphaned. The measure passed with 70 percent of the vote.

Colorado Division of Wildlife studies and published staff statements confirm that orphaned cubs are a certainty of spring bear hunting. Regulations prohibiting killing mother bears do not prevent orphaned cubs. **It may take up to 30 days for an orphaned cub to starve to death, with the cub too weak to stand a day before he dies.**

Twenty-four states out of the 32 that allow bear hunting prohibit spring bear hunting. None of the twenty-four states that prohibit spring bear hunting start their fall season before August.

Cubs are born while female bears are hibernating and emerge with their mothers from the den in April. They are completely dependent on their mothers until over five months of age – throughout spring bear hunting season and for much of the summer. **Cubs will still be orphaned if hunting occurs in the summer. Until June, cubs have no teeth to chew food and solely feed on their mother's milk. The cubs are completely dependent on their mothers during the summer, and are weaned anytime from mid July to September.**

Studies confirm that it is nearly impossible to distinguish between a female bear with cubs and one without, even when a well-meaning hunter wants to avoid killing a female bear. There is no discernable difference between a lactating female and a female not nursing cubs. Sows hold very little milk and it's even difficult for a biologist handling a dead bear at a check-in station to tell whether the female bear has cubs.

Studies also show that hunters cannot tell the difference between a male and female bear, even at close range. A mother bear traveling alone is no indication that the bear does not have cubs. During the spring, female bears often leave their cubs to protect them from predators or to forage for food. Cubs may be stashed by the mother bear up to two miles away.

House Bill 1294 ignores the will of voters and damages public trust in wildlife management. In 1992, voters chose to outlaw spring bear hunting. The legislature should respect the wishes of voters. Wildlife managers believe that wildlife ballot measures are a result of shutting out the opinion of most voters in management decisions. Bear quotas are on the rise but overall hunting has been declining in Colorado for decades, while other outdoor recreation increases. According to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, 93 percent of residents do not hunt. Support for traditional hunting, and its future, could quickly erode if the vast majority of residents perceive starving cubs as a component necessary to hunting.



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Noted Colorado Bear Biologist Acknowledges Problems with a Spring/Summer Bear Hunt

Tom Beck is a former bear biologist from the Colorado Division of Wildlife and has been quoted and published widely discussing the ineffectiveness of spring/summer bear hunting to manage Colorado's black bear population. **Beck discussed the 1996 ballot measure that banned spring bear hunting in an article in the Idaho Falls Post Register -- "In Colorado, bear hunters adapted quickly." April 10 1996. Rob Thornberry**

- The paper recognized Beck's expertise in this area by stating, "Beck has been Colorado's only bear researcher since 1980, and is the state's top authority on the law and its biological impacts." Beck said the law – which bans spring bear hunting, hound hunting for bears and bear baiting – has not decreased the annual harvest and may have diversified the age structure of the population.

Beck spoke at the Western Black Bear Workshop in 1995 about problems involved in spring bear hunting. (Beck et al – "Sociological and Ethical Considerations of Black Bear Hunting" from the Proceedings of the Western Black Bear Workshop. Pages 119-131 published in 1995.)

- "The biggest issue is the killing of nursing female black bears. There is no way to prevent this from happening in a spring bear season, either through hunter education or timing of season. ...The conclusion of most biologists is that it is quite difficult to accurately determine nursing status on free-ranging black bears, even when a bear is not in a tree or at a bait. The appearance of nursing females in the kill each spring supports this notion. During the last year of spring bear hunting in Colorado, the number of nursing female black bears checked was within three of the number predicted based on breeding rate of females and total female kill. In other words, there was no selection even with regulations prohibiting the taking of nursing females. Proponents of spring hunting usually point out that most states protect females with cubs by regulation. The regulation looks good on paper but is very difficult to implement in the field because of bear behavior." (p. 123)

And in a Colorado Division of Wildlife news release, Beck emphasized the ineffectiveness of hunting as a management tool for bears:

- "Recent accounts, including some in national and statewide newspapers, have cited an increasing bear population triggered by the end of spring bear hunting three years ago for the flurry of confrontations between bears and people. But Division biologists say there's simply no evidence to support the contention."
- "We are seeing confrontations between people and bears over much of the state, and it's largely due to the failure of the berry and acorn crop, not the end of the spring hunt," explained division bear researcher Tom Beck. "The increasing number of people building homes, cabins and condos in prime bear habitat – the oak brush that ranges between 6,500 and 8,000 feet – is another major factor."
- "Hunters have killed fewer bears since voters approved a 1992 ballot initiative that prohibits spring bear hunting and the use of dogs and bait to hunt bears. But the number of bears killed by fall hunters is increasing, and wildlife managers expect as many as 500 bears to be harvested this fall, which is within 100 of the number taken annually before the ballot initiative."
- "The number of September licenses is being increased to provide hunting recreation, not as a management tool to reduce the population. "Hunting is not effective in reducing the number of problem bears," Beck emphasized. "Individual problem bears need to be removed from the population." (Wildlife Report - News Release from the Colorado Division of Wildlife: "Division of Wildlife Provides 'Bear' Facts." Oct. 23 1995)



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