

# Fact Sheet

## Conserve Global Bear Populations and Stop Illegal Poaching of Bears

### Support H.R. 5534, the Bear Protection Act

U.S. Representatives Raul M. Grijalva (D-AZ) and John Campbell (R-CA) have reintroduced the Bear Protection Act, H.R. 5534, to prohibit the import, export and interstate trade in bear viscera – specifically the gallbladders and bile. Bile from bear gallbladders is used in traditional Asian medicines to treat a variety of illnesses, from diabetes to heart disease, as well as in some cosmetics and shampoos. Asian demand for bear viscera and products has increased with growing human populations and increased wealth, although humane alternatives clearly exist – including herbal substitutes approved by the traditional Asian medicine community and synthetic formulations. Huge profits can be made selling endangered bear parts in Asia (a single gall was auctioned in South Korea for \$10,000.)

**The Trade in Bear Parts is an International Problem:** While demand for bear viscera and products has grown, Asian bear populations have dwindled. Seven of the eight extant species of bears are affected by poaching to supply the increasing market demand for bear viscera and products. Most species of bears, and all Asian bear species, are afforded the highest level of protection under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) of Wild Fauna and Flora. CITES has noted that “the continued illegal trade in bear parts and derivatives of bear parts undermines the effectiveness of the Convention and that if CITES parties ... do not take action to eliminate such trade, poaching may cause declines of wild bears that could lead to the extirpation of certain populations or even species.”

**Poachers are Targeting America’s Bears:** Dwindling Asian bear populations have caused poachers to look to American bears to meet market demand for bear parts and products. While each year more than 30,000 American black bears are legally hunted in North America, some estimates suggest that the number illegally killed by poachers may equal or exceed that number.

**Cruel Tactics are Used:** Law enforcement agents report finding dead bears in this country with only the gallbladder and paws removed and the rest of the carcass left to rot in the woods. Bears that have been radio-collared for scientific purposes are particularly vulnerable, as are bears hibernating in dens during the winter. Organized poaching gangs use sophisticated technologies such as radio tracking and night-vision goggles to corner their prey. According to a police officer who videotaped poaching activity involving a bear cub repeatedly stabbed and then set upon by dogs after its mother’s gallbladder had been removed, “the cruelty was beyond any of our expectations. We expected quick clean kills with a minimum of fanfare or fuss, but they relished in the killing.”

**Most U.S. States Ban the Trade in Bear Parts:** The current patchwork of state laws addressing the bear parts trade creates an enforcement nightmare. Thirty-four states prohibit trade in bear gallbladders and bile; five states (ME, VT, ID, WY, and NY) allow it freely; and the others have a complex mesh of either no regulations, or laws that prohibit trade of bear parts from bears taken in-state but allow commercialization of bear parts if the bear was killed elsewhere. There is incentive to kill bears illegally in one state because individuals can then sell the parts legally in another state – completely circumventing the state laws that do prohibit the sale of bear parts.

**The Bear Protection Act Would Eliminate the Patchwork of State Laws and Improve Protection of America’s Bears:** Because the illegal trade in bear parts crosses state and national boundaries, a federal remedy is needed. The patchwork of state laws creates loopholes that are exploited by those engaged in the bear parts trade. The loopholes enable poachers to launder gallbladders through states that permit their sale, often escaping effective prosecution even when caught. The Bear Protection Act would assist local and state law enforcement by establishing a national prohibition on import, export, and interstate commerce in bear viscera.

**This Legislation is Narrowly Focused:** The Bear Protection Act is focused on deterring bear poaching and prosecuting bear poachers and bear parts traders. The bill in no way impacts lawful sport hunting under applicable state laws, including the keeping of bear trophies. Nor does it impact a state’s ability to set hunt seasons, hunt methods, or bag limits.



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