



## TESTIMONY **IN OPPOSITION**

**SB 1148** Authorizing Certain Killing and Hunting of Black Bears and Prohibiting Birdfeeders and other Unintentional or Intentional Feeding of Potentially Dangerous Animals

**SB 1149** Eliminating All Restrictions for Sunday Hunting on Public and Private Property

March 10, 2023

**To:** Honored Co-Chairs Sen. Lopes and Rep. Gresko, Vice Chairs Sen. Hochadel and Rep. Palm, Ranking Members Sen. Harding and Rep. Callahan, Distinguished Members of the Environment Committee

**From:** Lori Brown, Executive Director, CT League of Conservation Voters

On behalf of CTLCV, thank you for allowing us to express our strong **OPPOSITION to SB 1148 which would establish a lottery for the recreational hunting of black bears in Connecticut.**

CTLCV has opposed similar legislation in the past because it relies on false assumptions that hunting will resolve the issue of “nuisance” bears.

This issue has been raised at the legislature for many years, with hunters seeking open season and unrestricted ability to hunt bears in the deep woods where they naturally live. Hunting has no impact on bears that have been drawn into communities to take advantage of easy food sources provided by homeowners.

We acknowledge that bears are appearing across the state in areas they haven’t been seen before, but we challenge DEEP’s growth estimates because they are largely based on sightings and modeling. This may also underestimate cub mortality and the growth rate variation based on food availability, disease, and other sources of mortality. As far as we can tell, DEEP has not done an actual bear density study. In looking at the overall landscape of options, it is important to note that **DEEP already has the ability to destroy any bear that comes in conflict with humans, their pets, or their farms.**

A largescale hunt to reduce the population will not change the root cause of human-bear conflict in certain communities.

**Hunting bears will also orphan many cubs.** DEEP's misguided policies on bear cubs have led to additional tragedy, causing unnecessary suffering of bear cubs too young to be on their own.

Instead, DEEP should be implementing a much more robust statewide program to educate the public and advance "Bearsmart" programs.

Another bill was proposed with recommendations based on what is working in other states. **We urge the Environment Committee to review the basic concepts in HB 5160** and begin with these provisions before jumping directly to a highly controversial hunt.

CTLCV supports the approach taken by animal protection advocates who have been promoting non-lethal solutions to address this human-caused problem. Until recently, our state DEEP's efforts have been spotty at best in promoting successful non-lethal solutions.

**Non-lethal solutions are effective.** Connecticut needs to invest in these solutions and ensure that our state takes all the steps necessary to properly manage this important wild species.

SEE DOCUMENT BELOW: **"Keeping People Safe and Bears Wild"**

Black bears are crucial to the forest ecosystem. They help regulate insect populations, disperse seeds, open canopies, and amend soils. They are slow to reproduce, and their numbers are not large enough to survive a sustained hunt. Studies have shown time and again that it is food availability, not bear population numbers, that cause most negative human-bear interactions.

It is important for DEEP to fully pursue all the non-lethal actions available and not perpetuate the falsehood that hunting will resolve the problem. CTLCV asks the Environment Committee to reject this repeat effort to establish unnecessary hunting of protected wildlife and invest in non-lethal approaches.

**CTLCV also OPPOSES SB 1149** which would open up all of Connecticut to the hunting of any species using any form of weaponry. It would put people at risk hiking in the woods on their main day of leisure.

Thank you for considering our comments.

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## Keeping People Safe and Bears Wild

As black bears slowly return to Connecticut to their native habitat, it's natural that bear sightings will increase. Conflicts may arise when wild bears make a habit of foraging in areas where human-provided food is readily available. Yet solutions exist to avoid these problematic encounters, as proven by "Bearsmart" programs around the country which focus on community-based attractant removal and public education.

### Hunting CT's bears is unsafe, unnecessary, and won't help reduce interactions

- A bear killed far away in the woods is unlikely the same bear on your property or in your neighborhood.
- Hunting isn't even safe in residential areas where most interactions occur.
- Studies show that 1) hunting does not reduce human-bear conflicts;<sup>i</sup> 2) human-bear conflicts decline when attractants are removed, not after bears are killed; 3) **the people of Connecticut want humane resolutions to conflicts with wildlife**; 4) DEEP's culture is misaligned with this public value (American Wildlife Values Study<sup>ii</sup>).
- It's counterproductive to kill bears in their natural habitat exhibiting normal behaviors (i.e., eating native foods far from human neighborhoods) and teaching their cubs to do the same.
- CT law already allows qualified state agents to capture or kill a bear when there is a public health or safety threat.
- A hunt will lead to more orphaned cubs unable to fend for themselves.

### Fortunately, there are proven strategies that keep bears wild and people safe!

Success in preventing incidents with black bears depends on *human behavior*:

- **Never intentionally feed bears.**
- If you live in an area with bears, look into a bear-resistant trash can. Or, store your trash cans in a garage or shed and bring your garbage to the curb on the morning of pick up.
- Remove bird feeders from March through November. Bird baths, flowering plants, and nesting boxes are examples of other ways to attract birds without enticing bears.
- Don't leave unsecured food attractants around your home, including garbage, pet food, and greasy outdoor grills.
- Make bears feel unwelcome by making loud noises with an air horn, hand-clapping or yelling.
- **A negative experience (aversive conditioning) plus no food will teach bears to avoid that area.**
- Protect beehives, chicken coops and similar attractants with electric barriers.
- Keep pets in enclosed areas, and when hiking, keep dogs on a leash.
- If you do see a bear from afar, enjoy the moment! Never approach a bear, not even to get a photo.
- If the bear is acting aggressively, don't run; make yourself tall and large, and back away slowly.
- Keep bear spray on hand if you live or hike in bear territory.

**The CT Coalition to Protect Bears** is dedicated to ongoing educational outreach and legislative advocacy. Our goal is to promote proven non-lethal strategies that allow people and Connecticut's native black bears to co-exist peacefully.

**The CT Coalition to Protect Bears** opposes hunting of our state's small bear population. We support a feeding ban, humane and responsible rehabilitation policies for orphaned bear cubs, and state grants to help municipalities and farmers mitigate human-bear conflicts.

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<sup>i</sup> "We found no significant correlations between harvest and subsequent HBC [human-bear conflicts]. Although it may be intuitive to assume that harvesting more bears should reduce HBC, empirical support for this assumption is lacking despite considerable research (Garshelis 1989, Treves and Karanth 2003, Huygens et al. 2004, Tavss 2005, Treves 2009, Howe et al. 2010, Treves et al. 2010)." --Obbard et al. (2014) Relationships among food availability, harvest, and human-bear conflict at landscape scales in Ontario Canada. *Urus* 25(2): 98-110

<sup>ii</sup> A recent, large study found DEEP's culture to be misaligned with the values of the people of Connecticut. See American Wildlife Values study: <https://sites.warnercnr.colostate.edu/wildlifevalues/>. Connecticut-specific information can be found in Connecticut's state report (<https://content.warnercnr.colostate.edu/AWV/CT-WildlifeValuesReport.pdf>) and the Culture Memo (<https://content.warnercnr.colostate.edu/AWV/CT-AgencyCultureMemo.pdf>).