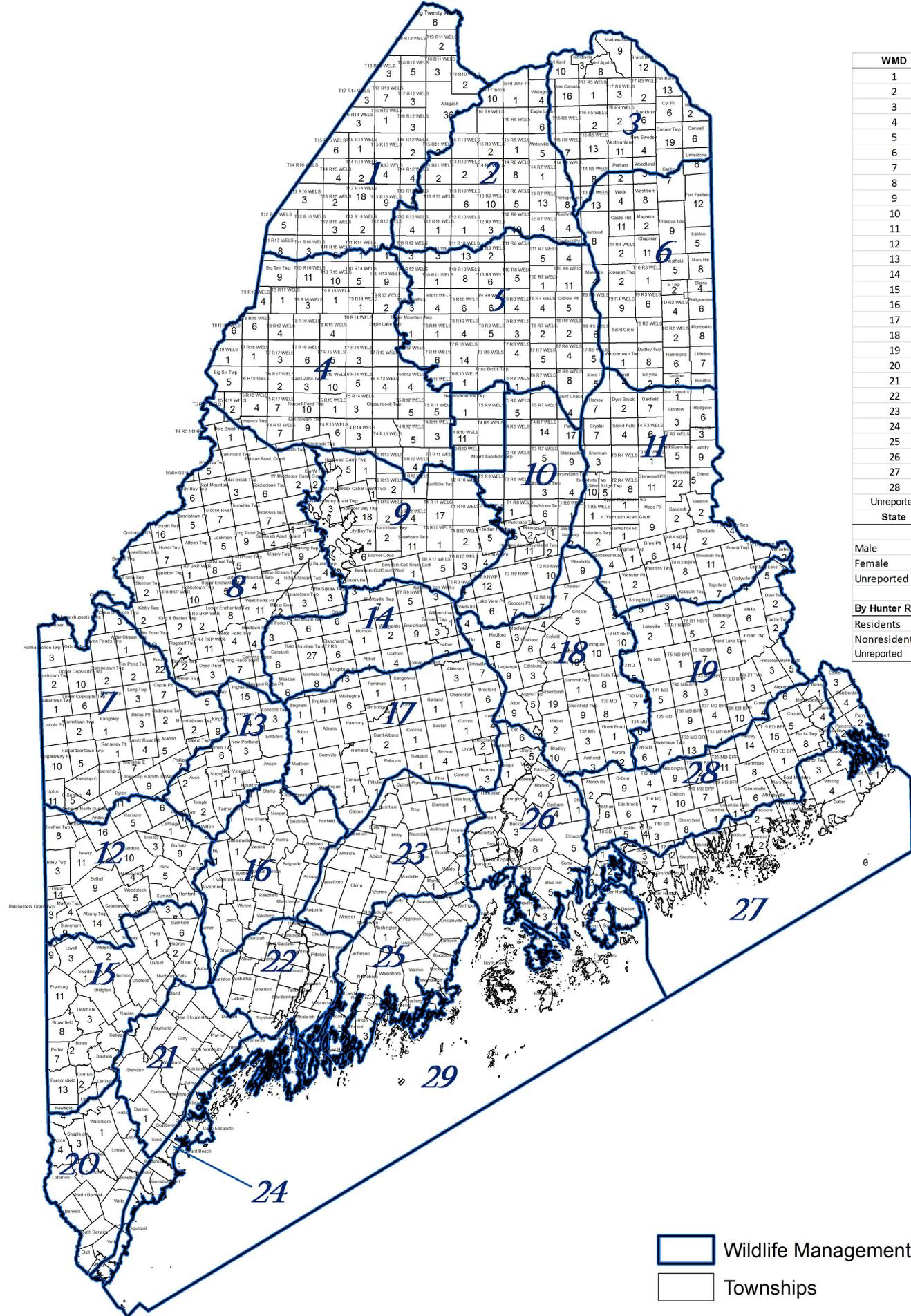


2015 Bear Harvest by Town

WMD	# of Bears
1	164
2	120
3	172
4	219
5	185
6	191
7	168
8	229
9	106
10	132
11	235
12	154
13	41
14	118
15	72
16	4
17	53
18	201
19	139
20	13
21	1
22	0
23	3
24	0
25	4
26	78
27	42
28	165
Unreported	7
State	3,016
Male	1,713
Female	1,273
Unreported	30
By Hunter Residence	
Residents	1,160
Nonresidents	1,854
Unreported	2



Maine's 2015 Black Bear Season

Starting this fall, youth hunters could hunt the Saturday prior to the opening of the season (August 29th). The general hunting season for black bears opened August 31 and closed November 28. Hunters were allowed to hunt bears near natural food sources or by still-hunting throughout the entire 3-month season. Hunting over bait was permitted from August 31 through September 26. The hound season overlapped the bait season, opening September 14 and closing October 30. The bear trapping season opened September 1 and closed October 31. Bear hunters can take 2 bears if 1 is taken by trapping and the other by hunting. This year, 24 hunters/trappers harvested 2 bears and 22 youth hunters shot a bear on youth day.

Since 2005, harvest has declined below objectives with between 2,400 to 3,486 bears harvested annually. This fall, 3,016 bears were taken during the 13 week fall season providing approximately 25,000 pounds of bear meat to hunters and their families. Most bears (92%) were taken with the use of bait, hounds, or traps: 2,091 bears were harvested over bait (69%), 514 bears were taken by hunters using hounds (17%), and 150 bears were taken in traps (5%). Only 8% were taken by other methods: 119 bears were harvested by deer hunters, and 142 bears were taken by unreported methods. Most bears (84%) were harvested earlier in the season with 2,551 bears harvested before the end of September. Natural food abundance varies from year to year; often, a year of high abundance is followed by a year of lower abundance or vice versa. This year, the higher abundance of natural foods caused a poor response to bait and low bait harvest (69%); conversely, bears enter their winter dens later, increasing opportunity for hunters late in the season (15% taken in October and November). By comparison, 2014 was a poor year for natural foods, resulting in more bears taken by bait hunters (77%) and fewer bears (8%) harvested in October and November.

Geographic Distribution of the Harvest

Bears were harvested in 26 of 29 Wildlife Management Districts (WMDs) with no bears taken in WMDs 22, 24 or 29. The density of harvest expressed as the number of bears killed per 100 square miles of forested land was greatest in WMD 28 and WMD 3 at 23 and 21 bears/100 mi², respectively and lowest in WMD's 16, 21, 23, 25 with ≤ 1 bear/100mi². In all other WMDs, hunters harvested between 3 and 18 bears/100 mi² (statewide average of 12 bears/100 mi²). Bears were harvested in 13 of the state's 16 counties. No bears were taken in Androscoggin, Kennebec, and Sagadahoc counties and between 1 and 3 bears in Cumberland, Knox, Lincoln, and Waldo counties.

Residence of Successful Hunters

Maine's reputation for producing high-quality bear hunting was again reflected in the distribution of the harvest by hunter residency. Visitors to Maine killed 1,854 bears of the 3,016 bears (62%) tagged during 2015. Non-resident hunters shot most of the bears (68%) taken over bait and with the use of hounds (64%), although bait hunting remained popular among resident hunters with 58% of successful resident hunters taking their bear over bait. Although fewer bears were taken during the deer season, or in traps, Maine residents accounted for the majority (87%, and 86%, respectively) of the bears taken during those seasons.

Assistance by Registered Maine Guides

In 2015, guides assisted 226 residents (20%) and 1,537 non-residents (83%) with their successful hunts. Assistance by guides accounting for 74% of bears harvested over hounds, 64% of the bears taken over bait, 15% of trapped bears, 11% of bears taken by unreported method, and 4% of bears taken by deer hunters.

Sex and Age Distribution of the Harvest

Males made up 57% (1,713 bears) of the 2015 harvest. Adult bears accounted for 92% (2,786 bears) of the harvest and sex and age were not reported for an additional 30 bears (1%).

Prospects for the 2016 season

Since 1997, the Department has adopted a generic bear season framework to maintain consistent hunting periods. However, bear hunting regulations can be modified in response to changes in Maine's bear population or other management concerns. The 2016 season will remain similar to recent years, opening with a youth day the last Saturday in August (August 27th). The general season will open the following Monday and will close the last Saturday in November (August 29th -November 29th). Successful hunts are influenced by a variety of factors, but natural food availability is often the most influential. In years with an abundance of soft or hard mast crops, hunters hunting over bait experience lower success while deer hunters and hunters that pursue bears with hounds have additional opportunity as bears remain out foraging on abundant food crops longer than in years with poor food abundance. All indications are that natural foods will remain poor this fall, providing greater opportunities for hunters early in the season and a higher total harvest.