



# 2019 Black Bear Summary

## 2019 Harvest Summary



Bear hunters in Vermont had a safe and successful hunting season in 2019. Licensed bear hunters harvested 750 bears (473 males, 277 females) during the 83 days of the two-part season (Table 1). There were also no hunting-related shooting incidents.

During the early season (September 1-November 15), 482 bears were harvested while 268 were taken during the late season (November 16-24). Unlike 2018 when 13% of the harvest occurred in the late season, fully 36% of the 2019 harvest occurred in the overlap with the November deer season. This higher late season harvest is typical of years with abundant fall foods. Bears were active throughout the rifle deer season making them more vulnerable to opportunistic deer hunters.

Sixty-three percent of the harvest was taken by hunters specifically targeting bears and 36% by opportunistic deer hunters. Of successful hunters specifically targeting bears, 25% used hounds to harvest a bear. The harvest from the use of hounds made up 16% of the total bear harvest. Archers took 16% of the total harvest with crossbows being used to harvest 35 of those. The harvest sex ratio was 1.7 males per female, and the average weight was 141 pounds. Many large bears were taken, including 12 bears weighing more than 300 pounds. An estimated 225,000 meals of nutritious wild game meat were provided by the bear harvest.

### Vermont's Black Bear Population and Habitat

The bear population in Vermont is currently estimated to be within the population objective in the *Big Game Management Plan* of 4,500 to 6,000 bears. Vermont's bear population is strong throughout the state, and abundant hunting opportunities exist in most areas.

**Table 1. 2019 Bear Harvest Tally Compared to Recent Years (2013-2019)**

Year	Bears Harvested	Male to Female Ratio	% taken in Nov. Deer Season	Heaviest Bears <sup>1</sup>	Largest Harvest (Town)	Largest Harvest (County)	Largest Harvest (WMU)
2013	556	1.6:1	45	450	Montgomery & Sutton (11)	Orleans (86)	D2 (81)
2014	562	1.4:1	19	376	Rockingham (12)	Rutland (65)	J2 (61)
2015	665	2.0:1	48	442	Readsboro (14)	Bennington (94)	J2 (61)
2016	697	1.4:1	21	449	Rochester (14)	Windham (79)	D1 (65)
2017	622	1.4:1	46	375	Arlington, Shaftsbury & Starksboro (11 each)	Bennington (86)	D1 (52)
2018	683	1.2:1	13	402	Pownal (19)	Rutland (75)	D1 (67)
2019	750	1.7:1	36	374	Starksboro (14)	Caledonia & Orleans (79 each)	J2 (87)

<sup>1</sup>Scaled/dressed weight

There are currently more than 800,000 acres of public land open under state or federal management including 99 Wildlife Management Areas distributed throughout the state.

The department expends considerable effort in protecting black bear habitat. Since 1995 more than 30,000 acres of significant black bear habitat have been protected in Vermont.

### Non-hunting Mortalities and Damage Complaints

One hundred thirty-seven bears were reported as non-hunting (incidental) mortalities during 2019. Ninety-two were killed in motor vehicle collisions and another 24 were dispatched due to bear-human conflicts. Total incidental mortalities were 25% fewer than those reported in 2018 (Table 2). Department law enforcement personnel received 427 other complaints involving bear, and wardens responded to a total of 554 calls from the public regarding non-hunting mortality incidents, damage, and general bear-human conflict complaints. The public can assist in reducing these conflicts by reporting any problems they have with bears to:

<https://anrweb.vt.gov/FWD/FW/WildlifeBearReport.aspx>

**Table 2. Non-hunting mortalities and damage complaints for 2018 and 2019.**

Mortality Type	2018 Number	2019 Number
Vehicle Collision	128	92
Management/Damage	42	24
Illegal	7	11
Other or Unknown Cause	6	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>137</b>
Bear Incident Complaints	478	427

The number of encounters and conflicts between bears and humans is likely to increase because the bear population has increased, bears now live in most towns outside Grand Isle County, and our expanding human population is encroaching into black bear range. The department has developed a protocol for handling black bear-human conflicts that is sensitive to personal property loss and human safety, as well as Vermont's bear population and management.

### 2019 Bear Harvest by Town and WMU

