

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
BUREAU OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

**BLACK BEAR RATING AND RESPONSE
CRITERIA**

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Approved by: David Chanda
David Chanda, Director

Authority: NJSA 13:1B-30-32; NJAC 7:25-5.23(r-t)

The Black Bear Rating and Response Criteria was designed to guide employees of the Division of Fish and Wildlife as well as employees of cooperating state, Federal and municipal agencies when responding to situations involving black bears in New Jersey. Bears are assigned to a category based on their behavior. This document details the appropriate response by the aforementioned personnel to requests for assistance regarding normal, nuisance, and dangerous behavior exhibited by New Jersey's black bears.

Wildlife Control Unit	908-735-8793	8:30 am to 4:30 pm M-F
Trenton Dispatch	877-927-6337	24 hours, 7 days per week
Wildlife Control Unit FAX	908-735-6161	24 hours, 7 days per week

Category I Bears

Category I black bears constitute a serious threat to life and property. Local authorities are required to report Category I incidents to the Wildlife Control Unit immediately by calling (908) 735-8793 during business hours and DEP Emergency Action Line (877) 927-6337 at other times. Failure to strictly follow the policy may result in continued negative behavior by the bear and possible risk to human safety. This category includes black bears that are involved in the dangerous behaviors listed below:

- A.** Attacks resulting in human injury or death.
- B.** Entries or attempted entries into areas of current human habitation (living space of homes, tents, camp buildings). Living space is defined as the domicile and enclosed porches and attached garages with closed garage doors. If the bear did not enter the living space, damaged screens, broken windows, or scratched doors of homes and buildings are to be classified as attempted home entries.
- C.** Entries or attempted entries into motor vehicles.
- D.** Attacks on or kills of protected large and small livestock. For the purpose of this document, "protected" means completely enclosed by properly installed and active electrified fencing, or otherwise enclosed in such a manner that prevents access by bears.
- E.** Attacks on or kills of domestic pets.
- F.** Tame or aggressive actions in which the animal approaches to within 10 feet of a human. Tame or aggressive behavior within 10 feet of a human includes but is not limited to bluff charging, chasing and following people, non-yielding behavior when approached by humans, refusal to respond to loud noises or aggressive attempts by people to drive the animal off.

G. Recognizable black bear damage documented by WCU personnel to commercial orchards, nurseries, vineyards, row crops, and protected apiaries (beehives).

H. Property damage estimated by the property owner to be in excess of \$1,000.00 to buildings, homes, sheds, garages, vehicles, home gardens, fruit trees, ornamental plantings, etc.

Category I bears may be destroyed immediately by capture and lethal injection, capture and shooting, or free-range shooting provided the animal is observed exhibiting the negative behaviors listed above by Wildlife Control Unit personnel, Bureau of Law Enforcement personnel, State Park Police, or authorized local law enforcement officers (any of these personnel may be referred to below as “properly trained officers”). Under these circumstances any properly trained officer on the scene is authorized to destroy the animal. Destruction of a Category I bear must be reported immediately to the WCU.

In cases where eyewitnesses or Wildlife Control Unit personnel do not observe the animal, Wildlife Control Unit personnel will attempt to capture the animal by placing culvert traps or foot snares at the site. Upon capture, Wildlife Control Unit personnel are authorized to destroy the animal.

Category II Bears

Category II black bears are nuisance bears which are not a threat to life and property. Properly trained officers may treat these animals with aversive conditioning techniques if the opportunity is available. Local authorities are required to report Category II incidents to the Wildlife Control Unit within 24 hours of the incident. Any incident in which a properly trained officer attempts to condition a bear must be reported to the Wildlife Control Unit within 24 hours by telephone or FAX using report forms provided by the Division. This category includes black bears exhibiting the negative behaviors listed below:

A. Persistent, repeated visits and appearances at school buildings, school bus stops, playgrounds, campgrounds, or restaurants (more than two visits after property owner has followed recommendations of WCU personnel), provided the bear has not exhibited any Category I behavior.

B. Repeated, habitual use of trash dumpsters or neighborhood trash cans as a food source (more than two visits after property owner has implemented recommendations of WCU personnel).

C. Property damage estimated by the property owner to be less than \$1,000.00 to buildings, sheds, detached garages, vehicles, home gardens, fruit trees, ornamental plantings, etc.

D. Attacks on or kills of unprotected large and small livestock.

E. Damage to unprotected apiaries (beehives).

Wildlife Control Unit personnel may respond to Category II Bear situations by setting foot snares or culvert traps in an attempt to catch the animal. Such animals will receive aggressive aversive conditioning designed to affect a change in behavior. Wildlife Control Unit personnel or other authorized and trained law enforcement personnel may aversively condition the bear on-site if conditions are appropriate or else at a relocation site within its home range (within 10 air miles, preferably in the township of origin). If the animal repeats unacceptable category II behavior or returns to the initial capture site, properly trained officers may destroy the animal. Destruction of a Category II bear must be reported immediately to the WCU.

Category III Bears

Category III black bears are animals that are exhibiting normal behavior and are not creating a nuisance or a threat to the safety of the public. In general, these are animals observed and reported to the Wildlife Control Unit by the public or local authorities. Such animals may be considered by the caller to be a nuisance or a danger because the caller has not had the experience of interacting with bears. Category III bears include:

- A.** Dispersing animals that wander into densely populated areas.
- B.** Bears passing through rural and suburban neighborhoods.
- C.** Bears observed by hunters, hikers, campers, and others using facilities in black bear habitat.
- D.** Bears occasionally utilizing birdfeeders and trash containers.
- E.** Injured or diseased black bears.
- F.** Abandoned or orphaned black bear cubs.

The Wildlife Control Unit will offer assistance in the form of technical advice on bear-proofing surroundings to callers reporting Category III encounters. Returning Category III bears will not be considered Category II bears unless the complainant makes an attempt to follow bear proofing recommendations.

Injured or diseased black bears should be reported to the Wildlife Control Unit immediately. Unit personnel will respond to the location if local authorities maintain visual contact with the animal or will advise the local authorities of the proper course of action. After an assessment of the ability of the animal to survive on its own, Wildlife Control Unit personnel will make a decision on the best course of action (capture or euthanasia). Injured or diseased black bears may be destroyed by WCU personnel, Bureau of Law Enforcement personnel, State Park Police, or properly trained police officers.

Black bears moving freely through urban or suburban neighborhoods and not exhibiting Category I behavior will not require an on-site response by the Division. In general these animals do not represent a threat to public safety other than that posed by the potential for vehicle strikes. A Category III bear confined in a fenced area or treed in an urban setting during daylight hours, any movement from which would result in a threat to the safety of the public or the animal due to potential vehicle collision, may precipitate an on-site response by the Wildlife Control Unit. Unit personnel may attempt to capture such bears and remove them from the unsuitable setting.

Wandering bears that are removed from urban or suburban locations will be tagged and tattooed for identification. Such animals will be transferred and released on the closest or most appropriate state administered land with suitable habitat. Under no circumstances should any attempt be made by any local authorities to capture any black bear. If a Category III bear is treed or confined in daylight hours and Wildlife Control Unit personnel cannot respond because of other pressing commitments, properly trained officers may destroy the bear if it is considered to be an immediate threat to public safety. Otherwise, the animal should be allowed to roam freely without harassment until it can extricate itself from the situation or it becomes capturable.

Abandoned or orphaned cubs found prior to July 1 (less than 6 months of age) will be captured and either placed in an occupied den or placed with a licensed bear rehabilitator. Rehabilitated cubs will be handled and released according to current policies for potentially dangerous species (released as close to site of capture as practical). If capture is not possible, WCU personnel will monitor the area through contact with local residents. Should young cubs begin to exhibit behavior that makes capture more likely, WCU personnel will attempt capture and placement. After July 1, cubs that are abandoned or orphaned will be allowed to roam free and fend for themselves unless evaluation by WCU personnel indicates they should be captured and placed with a wildlife rehabilitator.