

Department of Natural Resources SCI-MIC Supported Research Projects 2014 Progress Reports

Southern Michigan Black Bear Project

We initiated this project in March 2010. To date, we've equipped 18 bears (8 females, 10 males) with GPS collars provided by Safari Club International-Michigan Involvement Committee, UP Bear Houndsmen, and Michigan Bear Hunters Association. The primary study area was in the agricultural-mixed forest landscape of Newaygo and Oceana Counties; however, bears were collared as far south as Merrill and Whitehall.

We conducted preliminary analyses of GPS locations collected from 7 bears and presented results at the 2013 Wildlife Society Conference in Milwaukee, WI. Our analyses indicated bears selected wetlands and forested habitats while avoiding agriculture and roads. Preliminary results suggest that range expansion by bears into southern Michigan may be unlikely; however, additional data is needed to provide confidence in these findings. Additional findings continue to confirm that bears in Michigan have home-ranges that exceed most other eastern black bears by up to five times. Adult male home-ranges are typically hundreds of square miles in area.

In winter 2013-14, we visited 7 bear dens (5 females, 2 males) to retrieve data and refit collars. During den visits we collared 2 yearling bears (1 female, 1 male). Yearling collars are attached loosely to allow for growth and unfortunately both collars were removed by the bears by early summer. One adult male would not allow us to approach his den without bolting, so in April, members of MBHA used hounds to assist us in retrieving his collar. Also, in March members of the Mid-Michigan Chapter-SCI accompanied us on a female's den in central Newaygo County. She had 3 healthy cubs and a visit to her den this winter will determine how many cubs survived the summer.

Four bears from last winter still have functioning collars and we are planning den visits in March 2015. We plan to remove all collars this winter. Data from the past 2 years will be combined with the data used in preliminary analyses to complete analyses. A final report will be prepared by fall 2015.