

Hunter Guidance for the 2024 Black Bear Season

There are 3 changes to bear hunting regulations for the 2024 Black Bear hunting season:

1. Hunters may NOT attempt to take or kill a black bear weighing less than 75 pounds (live weight), or less than 50 pounds dressed.
2. Hunters may NOT attempt to take or kill an adult black bear that is in the presence of cub(s) (bears weighing less than 75 pounds).
3. Hunters may NOT attempt to take or kill a black bear or have a loaded weapon within 300 ft. of a baited area when hunting bears.

Tips for determining a bear's weight in the field:

Take time to study the animal to observe its physical traits. Try to determine the size/height of objects around where you set up to use for size perspective later. It is said that a 75-lb bear is about the same size as an adult black Labrador retriever.

1. First Impression

If you immediately think that it's a large bear, you may be right. But sometimes initial impressions are deceiving. If there's no object or other animal around the bear it may be hard to judge size. If it wanders out into a field, it's almost impossible to gauge size without further analyzing physical traits.

2. Leg Position

One of many physical traits you can home in on is the appearance of the bear's legs. If they seem far apart, that likely means it's a larger bear. If the front and rear legs look like they're close together, it's probably a smaller animal.

3. Leg Length

Besides being positioned further apart, the legs on a big bear also look short because old boars usually have large stomachs. This makes the legs look short.

If lots of daylight shows between the stomach and the ground, the legs will look longer. You're likely seeing a small bear.

4. Ear Position

Ears also can give clues to a bear's age and size. If they look like they come out the sides of the animal's head, you're looking at a large bear. If they seem to pop up off the top of the bear's head, it's a small one.

5. Ear Size

Also consider ear proportion. If the ears look about normal for the bear's head and body, it's probably an adult bear. If the ears look large, the bear is likely young.

6. Face

Faces of old boars look thicker and blockier than females or young males. But compared to his huge body, a big bear's head may look rather small.

7. Shoulders and Neck

Like a mature buck, the front shoulders of a mature bear are broad and muscular, and they have beefy forelegs. The necks of big bears are thick and short, merging right into the animal's body.

What is considered a "Baited Area"?

By law, "baited area" means the presence of placed, exposed, deposited, distributed, or scattered agricultural products, salt, or other edible lure whatsoever capable of attracting, enticing, or luring bears.

Therefore, if you have pre-baited an area prior to the hunting season you may still hunt within that area provided there is no longer any remaining bait, or you must be at least 300 feet away from any remaining bait.

What if I'm hunting deer and bear at the same time?

Several deer seasons run at the same time as the December bear hunt. If hunting both deer and bear, you may not possess buckshot and any ammunition not legal for bear hunting.