

# TECHNICAL NOTES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE      WYOMING      SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

Biology No. 103

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Subject: BLACK BEAR\*

## General

The black bear (Ursus americanus) is found in mountainous regions, primarily associated with forested areas.

## Food Requirements

Black bears are omnivorous. One study reported the composition of black bear food items, based on both scat analysis and stomach samples from 48 bears, to be:

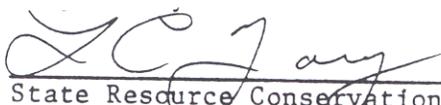
Food Type	Percent of Total Bulk
Plant Material	64.55
Insects	17.20
Miscellaneous (wood, mud, etc.)	7.90
Animal Material	7.00
Trace Items	3.35

Primary plant foods include cow parsnip (Heracleum lanatum), serviceberry (Amelanchier bakerii) and other berries, acorns (Quercus gambelii) and pea vine (Lathyras spp.).

Most animal material is consumed as carrion. Bears are usually predatory only when an easy opportunity presents itself or when plant foods are scarce. Primary insect foods are ants and ant eggs.



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\*Information taken from Ecoregion M3113 Handbook and Habitat Suitability Index Models, Wildlife Species Narratives (literature searches), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, various dates between 1978-1984.

In Montana, the relative importance of different food items varied throughout the year as the bear adjusted its diet to select food items which were most available.

#### Water Requirements

Black bears require a source of free water. They drink freely, but also use wet places such as wallows to escape insects, assist shedding, and to cool off.

#### Cover Requirements

Black bears require forested areas. The mixed conifer and hardwood stand is ideal since a bear will not stay in a hardwood stand..devoid of leaves. Trees furnish protection, dens, food, and promote the growth of understory plants, especially at the periphery of wooded areas. Protected locations such as hollow trees, caves, and cliff overhangs are necessary for winter dens.

Black bears are generally found in either the Canadian Life Zone in which Engelmann spruce (Picea engelmanni) is the dominant vegetation type or the Transition Zone, which is typified by Ponderosa pine (Pinus Ponderosa), Douglas Fir (Pseudotsugua menziesii), and abundant understory.

#### Reproductive Requirements

Black bear cubs are born while the female is in the winter den in February or March.

#### Special Habitat Rerquirements

No special habitat requirements were found in the literature.

#### Interspersion Requirements

Because of the great variety of foods utilized by the black bear, a diverse habitat is necessary. Writing about the back-country bears of Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming, one researcher said, "Forests with a variety of tree species . . . interspersed by large meadows and open hillsides received more use by bears than forests with few tree species . . . intermixed by small meadows."

One study reported that use of forested areas by bears range from approximately 30 percent in May to over 95 percent in August. They also reported that over 90 percent of their study area in Montana was forested.

Black bear home ranges in Montana were 1.6 sq. mi. (4.12 km<sup>2</sup>) for females and 3.9 sq. mi. (10.1 km<sup>2</sup>) for males.

#### Special Considerations

Although noted for their shyness, black bears will raid garbage dumps and campsites in search of easy food.

This species is blamed for the death of much livestock, although such reports are frequently exaggerated. Such predation is usually confined to individual killer bears or prompted by the scarcity of other food sources.