



REDUCING HUMAN-BEAR CONFLICTS IN NEIGHBORHOODS



The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) mission is to manage fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people. FWC strives to manage wildlife in a responsible manner. When people have conflicts with wildlife, FWC provides the best options to resolve those issues in an effective manner.



While wild animals typically try to avoid people, they are attracted into and will linger in neighborhoods if they can access food such as unsecured garbage, pet food, or bird seed. Animals such as bears, coyotes, raccoons, skunks, opossums, feral/loose cats and dogs, foxes, vultures, and small rodents (e.g., rats, mice) are all attracted to the large quantity of calories they can commonly find in trashcans.



Unfortunately, many animals can carry diseases that are transferable to humans or pets just by being in the same location, or through the increased potential for physical contact. If bitten, the saliva from some animals contains many different harmful bacteria. In addition, ticks are carried into the area, which can attach to people or pets and transfer a variety of diseases.



The most common animals to contract rabies are raccoons, foxes, cats, and dogs. All of those animals are attracted to and will eat unsecured trash. Of Floridians who have been bitten by animals and subsequently were recommended for rabies post exposure treatments, approximately 2/3 were bitten by either dogs or cats.

The most effective long-term solution to keeping wildlife from frequenting your neighborhood is to prevent them from accessing foods like garbage, pet food, and bird seed. FWC offers many options for people to secure their trash and other attractants at MyFWC.com/bear.



Florida Black Bears and Garbage

With a growing human and black bear population in Florida, human-bear conflicts are on the rise (Figure 1). The majority of calls FWC receives statewide are related to bears entering neighborhoods to access garbage (i.e., reports refer to a bear In Garbage, In Area, In Yard, or In Tree; Figure 2).

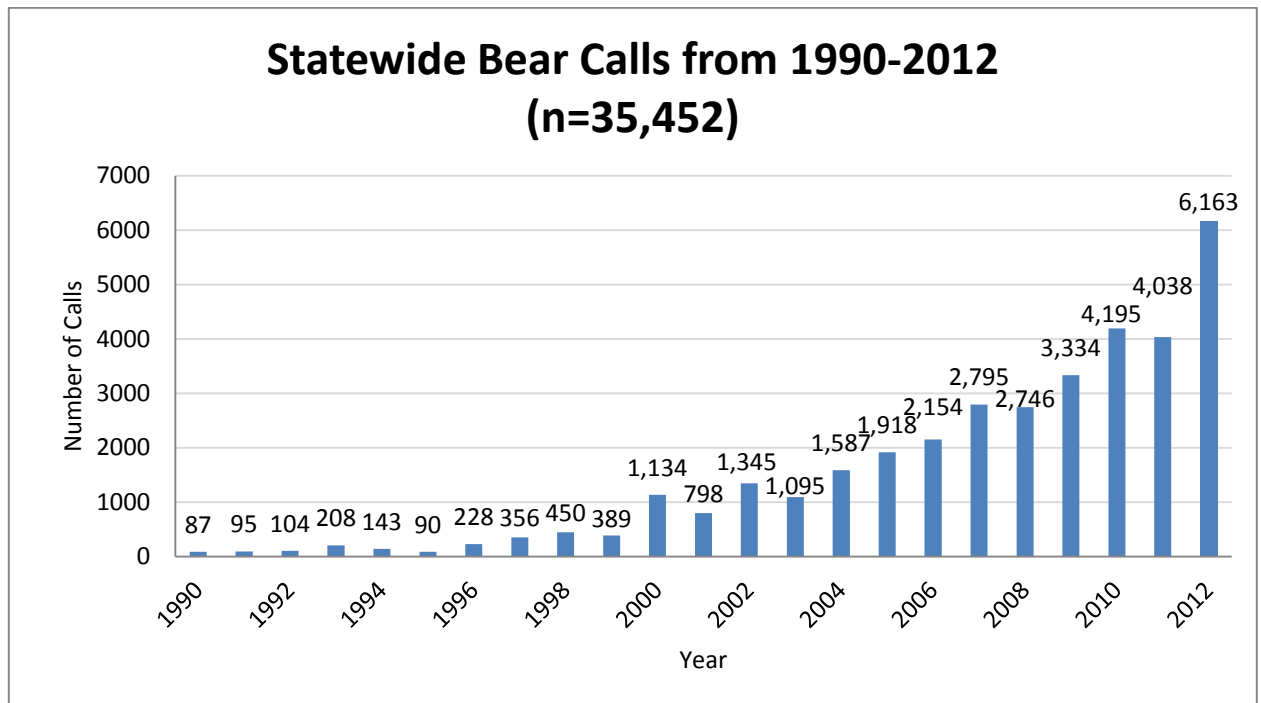


Figure 1. Bear-related calls received by FWC in Florida from 1990 to 2012 (n = 35,452).

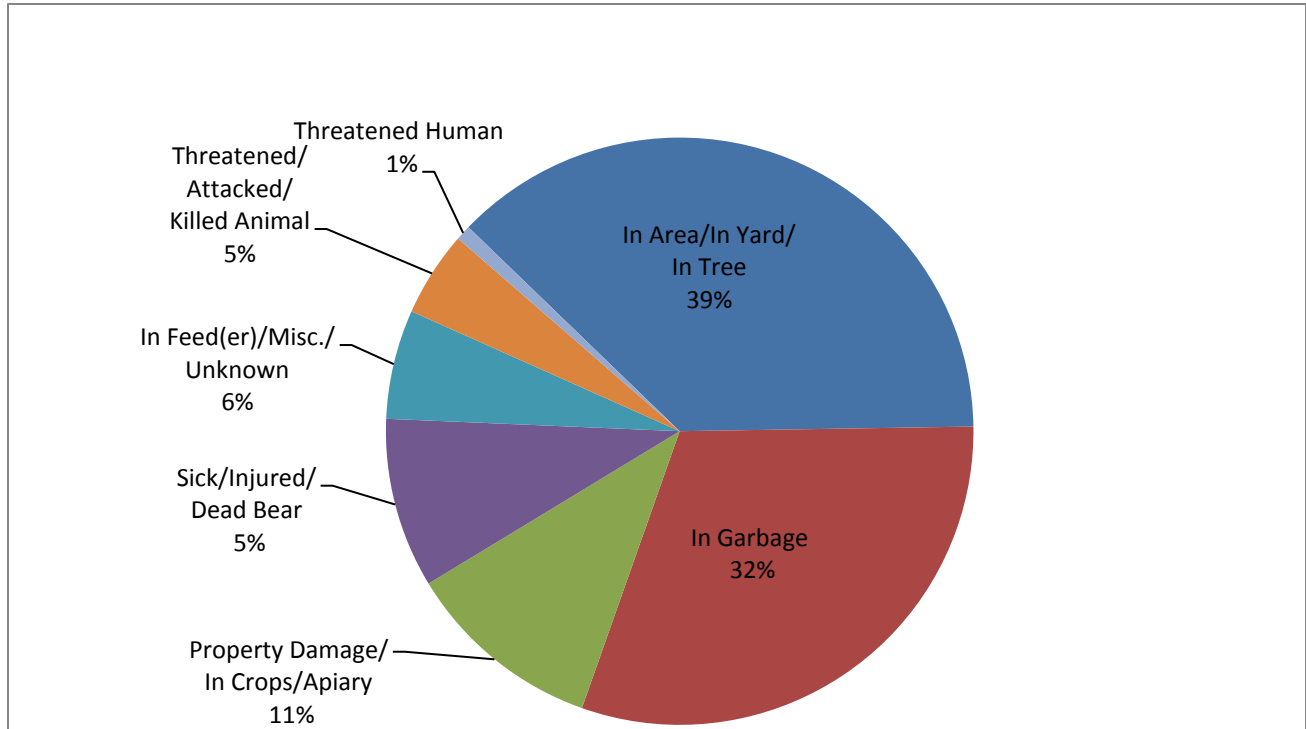


Figure 2. Types of bear-related calls received by FWC statewide from 1990 to 2011 (n = 29,898).

Therefore, FWC has been focusing their efforts on encouraging people to secure their garbage from bears. FWC evaluates different methods to secure trash, and recently compared the effectiveness of modifying a regular trashcan with common hardware against commercially manufactured ‘bear-proof’ trashcans. Residents involved in the tests were surveyed before they received the modifications or bear-resistant trashcans as well as six and 12 months after. While both of these devices were successful at reducing human-bear conflicts, the bear-resistant trashcans were the most effective option (Table 1).



Table 1. Survey results of residents’ interactions with bears before and 12 months after using retrofitted or bear-resistant trashcans.

Trashcan Type	Bear Interactions Before	Bear Interactions After
Modified	71%	32%
Bear-Resistant	97%	5%

The vast majority of survey respondents in both test areas highly recommended the devices (>90%) and indicated the devices were effective at reducing their human-bear conflicts (>87%).

FWC also conducted a survey of Florida residents and businesses who have bear-resistant trash containers who were not involved in the above-referenced tests. Before using bear-resistant containers, 60% of respondents had interactions with bears 1 to 7 times per week. After using bear-resistant containers, the frequency of interactions decreased dramatically, with 73% of respondents reporting they only had interactions with bears once every 6 to 12 months. In addition, 96% of respondents indicated they would recommend bear-resistant containers.

Communities that have secured their waste systems have experienced a dramatic drop in human-bear conflicts. On Hurlburt Air Field in Okaloosa County, for example, staff switched regular residential trashcans and commercial dumpsters to bear-resistant models. In addition to an educational effort and training with security personnel on how to respond to conflicts, human-bear conflicts declined by 70% over a two-year period.

For more information visit: MyFWC.com/bear



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