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Williams Stephens Pat

Ray Darville

Department of Social & Cultural Analysis, Stephen F Austin State University

Adam Keul

Michael Legg

Christopher E. Comer

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Pat, Williams Stephens; Darville, Ray; Keul, Adam; Legg, Michael; and Comer, Christopher E., "Stakeholders' Attitudes Toward Black Bear in East Texas (Abstract)" (2011). *Faculty Publications*. 304.

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Stakeholders' Attitudes Toward Black Bear in East Texas

PAT STEPHENS WILLIAMS,¹ RAY DARVILLE,² ADAM KEUL,¹ MICHAEL LEGG,¹
NATHAN GARNER,³ AND CHRIS COMER¹

¹College of Forestry and Agriculture, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, Texas, USA

²College of Liberal and Applied Arts, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, Texas, USA

³Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Tyler, Texas, USA

This study advances black bear management in East Texas by understanding residents' attitudes toward the return of black bear to the region and potential reintroduction efforts. Six counties in the study have the potential to be impacted by a returning population. The objective was to assess public knowledge, opinions, and attitudes of stakeholders related to black bears, management of particular species, and their habitats.

Surveys were mailed to 2,000 households in the six counties. More than half of the respondents indicated they favored bears dispersing on their own but did not support agency intervention to reintroduce them. Respondents worried about problems that may arise from dispersal. Managers may use the results to identify areas of potential conflict and employ public information and education campaigns to encourage a public more receptive of black bears and management efforts.

Keywords black bear, attitudes, reintroduction, wildlife management, *Ursus americanus luteolus*

Introduction

The Louisiana Black Bear (*Ursus americanus luteolus*) is an endangered species native to the wooded eastern third of Texas (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department [TPWD], 2005), and one of the 16 subspecies of the American black bear (*Ursus americanus americanus*). Over the last fifteen years there has been much agency and public discussion concerning reintroduction of the species to the East Texas area. The reintroduction of a large carnivore into populated areas presents challenges for wildlife managers. Public involvement early in the reintroduction planning process can help managers better understand the characteristics of the affected communities (Chase, Decker, & Lauber, 2004; Enck & Brown, 2002 & 2005). Public opinion should not be the sole source of guidance in decision-making, however, public awareness of management decisions may minimize human-wildlife conflict (Decker, Brown, & Siemer, 2001; Enck & Brown, 2002 & 2005). This study contributes to the knowledge and understanding of stakeholders' attitude toward black bear in north East Texas and potential management decisions based on that information.

Address correspondence to Dr. Pat Stephens Williams, College of Forestry and Agriculture, Box 6109, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, TX 75965, USA. E-mail: stephensp@sfasu.edu

Authenticated subscribers may link to full text here:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10871209.2011.608181>