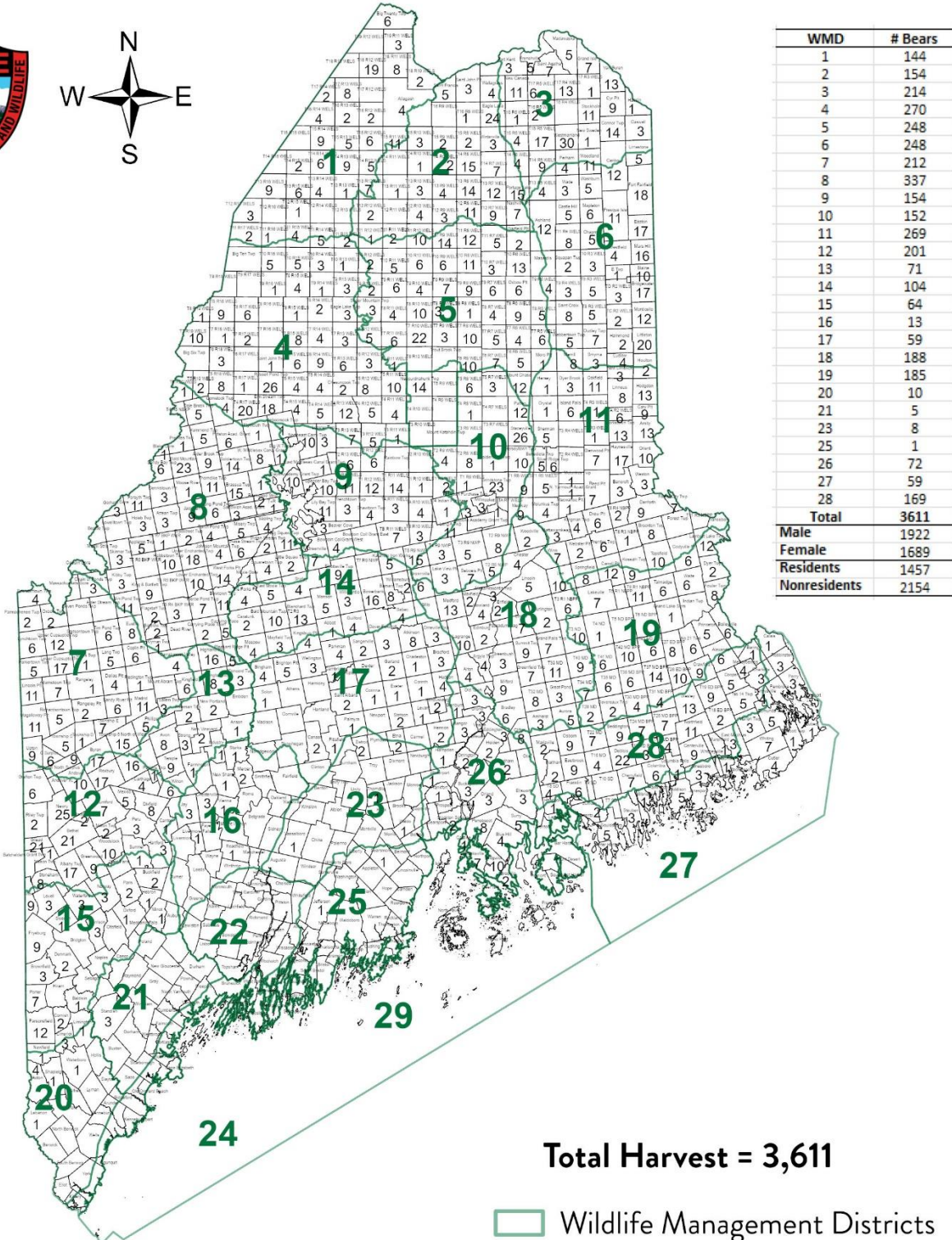


Bear Harvest 2025



WMD	# Bears
1	144
2	154
3	214
4	270
5	248
6	248
7	212
8	337
9	154
10	152
11	269
12	201
13	71
14	104
15	64
16	13
17	59
18	188
19	185
20	10
21	5
23	8
25	1
26	72
27	59
28	169
Total	3611
Male	1922
Female	1689
Residents	1457
Nonresidents	2154

Total Harvest = 3,611

Wildlife Management Districts

Maine's 2025 Black Bear Season

The general hunting season for black bears opens the last Monday in August and closes the last Saturday in November. Hunters can hunt bears near natural food sources or by still-hunting throughout the entire 3-month season. The bear trapping season spans 2 months opening on September 1 and closing on October 31. Hunting over bait is permitted during the first 4 weeks of the season (August 25-September 20, 2025). The hound season overlaps the last two weeks of the bait season and continues through the following five weeks (September 8-October 31, 2025). Most bears are harvested during the first month of the season and with the use of bait, dogs, or traps. Only 3% are harvested by spot/stalk or still-hunting or by deer hunters during the November firearm season. Starting in 2015, youth hunters were permitted to hunt the Saturday prior to the opening of the season and since 2008, hunters can take two bears if one is taken by trapping and the other by hunting. In 2025, 58 youth hunters shot a bear on youth day, and 59 hunters harvested 2 bears, above the average of 33 hunters taking 2 bears annually since 2015.

Natural food abundance varies from year to year and can have a strong influence on the final harvest. In 2025, we expected an abundance of natural food and thus lower overall harvest; however the drought in much of the state led to high statewide bear harvest at 3,611 bears. Hunter participation also remained high (~12,700 bear permits) with a high proportion of bears taken over bait (61%), higher harvest by hound hunters (981 bears) and trappers (359 bears), which has been the new trend over the last 6 years. Natural food levels also influence bear harvest by deer hunters. In years of higher food abundance, bears forage longer providing deer hunters greater opportunity to harvest a bear. This year's harvest of 23 bears during the November deer season suggests that bear entered dens early.

Geographic Distribution of the Harvest

In 2025, bears were harvested in 14 of the state's 16 counties and in 26 of 29 WMDs. Although the highest harvest occurred in Aroostook County (1,034 bears, 29% of total harvest), the density of harvest, expressed as the number of bears killed per 100 square miles of forested land, remains greatest in portions of northern, western and eastern Maine with between 21 and 26 bears/100 mi² harvested in WMDs 3, 6, 12, and 28. Fewer bears were taken in southern portions of the State with only 1 to 7 bears harvested in Androscoggin, Cumberland, Kennebec, Lincoln, and Waldo counties and less than five bears/100 mi² harvested in WMDs 16, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, and 29. In all other WMDs, hunters harvested between 5 and 18 bears/100 mi² (statewide average of 14 bears/100 mi²). No bears were taken in Knox and Sagadahoc counties and in WMDs 22, 24, and 29.

Residence of Successful Hunters

Maine's reputation for producing high-quality bear hunting was again reflected in the distribution of the harvest by hunter residency. Visitors to Maine killed 2,154 bears (60%) of the 3,611 bears tagged during 2025. Non-resident hunters shot more of the bears taken over bait (61%) and with the use of hounds (72%). However, hunting over bait remained popular among resident hunters with 59% of successful resident hunters taking their bear over bait. Although fewer bears were taken during the deer season, in traps, or by spot and stalk methods, Maine residents accounted for the majority (92%, 76%, and 84% respectively) taken during those seasons.

Assistance by Registered Maine Guides

In 2025, guides assisted 492 residents (34%) and 1,973 non-residents (92%) with their successful hunts. Assistance by guides accounted for 90% of bears harvested with trained bear dogs, 66% of the bears taken over bait, 30% of trapped bears, 14% of bears taken by spot/stalk/still-hunt methods, and 8% of the bears taken while deer hunting.

Sex and Age Distribution of the Harvest

Males made up 53% (1,922 bears) of the 2025 harvest. Adult bears accounted for 94% (3,400 bears) of the harvest.

Prospects for the 2026 season

Since 1997, the Department has adopted a generic bear season framework to maintain consistent hunting periods. However, regulations can be modified in response to changes in the bear population or other management concerns. The 2026 bear season will include two additional youth days; one the Friday prior to the existing youth day (August 28 & 29), and the addition of a youth day for bear hunting with dogs (September 12). A variety of factors influence success, and natural foods are often the most influential. When mast crops are abundant, hunters hunting over bait have lower success while deer hunters and hunters that pursue bears with hounds have greater opportunity with bears foraging longer and entering dens later. If natural food trends follow previous alternate year patterns, we anticipate higher harvest and more opportunity to take a bear over bait and less success over natural food sources or later in the season with bears entering dens earlier; however, local natural food trends may vary.