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POSITION ON BLACK BEAR RELOCATION IN NEW JERSEY

The NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife (NJDFW) argues that the bears' expansion justifies hunting, but the reverse is true: the desire to re-establish a bear hunt in South Jersey is the reason for the NJDFW's bear relocation program. The agency claims that bears have been sighted in every county in NJ, but that should be no surprise to the agency that put them there.

The NJDFW admits to moving bears farther south and even developed a plan to do so in 1981, to bring bear hunting back to the Pine Barrens. In the NJ Bureau of Wildlife Management's 1981 report titled "Restoration of the Black Bear to the New Jersey Pine Barrens," NJ state biologists wrote, "The bears will be transported to selected sites in southern New Jersey and released . . . It is unlikely that the south would eventually be reinhabited through natural dispersion . . . This would provide an increased recreational opportunity for Pine Barrens sportsmen."

See the NJDFW's full report at: <http://www.aplnj.org/assets/pdf/BearRelocationProposal.pdf>

Although the 1981 plan was ultimately rejected, it shows that the NJDFW's current bear relocation program is based on two things: the knowledge that bears would be unlikely to move to south Jersey naturally and a desire to bring bear hunting back to the Pine Barrens. This is no surprise, considering that the NJDFW is run by hunters, for hunters.

The NJDFW's current bear relocation program was classified as "secret" in 2005. ("The bear relocation program is now secret" by Sue Epstein, May 17, 2005, Star Ledger) In 2005, Martin McHugh, then-Director of the Division of Fish and Wildlife, was quoted in the Asbury Park Press: "In each relocation, we try to figure out where the bear was headed and then find the nearest and available open space for it." ("Bolder bears expand territory," by Bob Jordan, June 6, 2005, Asbury Park Press) In 2005, a bear was moved from Woodbridge, NJ to Assunpink Wildlife Management Area in Millstone and Upper Freehold, NJ. Also in 2005, a bear was moved from Middletown, NJ to Turkey Swamp Wildlife Management Area in Freehold, NJ.

In both cases, the bears were moved farther south, and local authorities were not notified until after the relocation.

Doris Lin, Esq., Vice President of Legal Affairs for the BEAR Group and Director of Legal Services for the Animal Protection League of NJ states, "It's more of a bear hunt expansion program, than a bear relocation program. It has nothing to do with managing the bear population and everything to do with trophies."

The BEAR Group and APLNJ oppose the state's relocation of black bears as a means to reestablish bear populations for the purposes of maintaining an institutionalized hunt and garnering support for such.