

MDC invites public to open houses on black bears

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) invites the public to a series of open houses to learn more about black bears in Missouri. The open houses will include information on MDC black-bear research projects and management efforts, MDC's draft black bear management plan, potential future hunting opportunities, and how to handle conflicts with nuisance bears. MDC staff will also be taking comments on these and other related topics regarding black bears in Missouri.

The meetings will be from 6 – 8 p.m. with a presentation at 6 p.m. on the dates and at the locations listed below. No registration is required.

- **July 9 – MDC Springfield Nature Center, 4601 S. Nature Center Way in Springfield**
- **July 11 -- The Landing, 110 Front St. in Van Buren**
- **July 18 -- First Baptist Church, 202 Walnut St. in West Plains**
- **July 30 – MDC Powder Valley Nature Center, 11715 Cragwold Road in St. Louis.**

For more information, contact MDC Public Involvement Coordinator Michele Baumer at Michele.Baumer@mdc.mo.gov, or 573-522-4115 Ext. 3350.

Out of the three species of bears that live in the U.S. -- black bears, polar bears, and grizzlies -- the American black bear is the only species that resides in Missouri. The black bear is one of the largest and heaviest wild mammals in Missouri, some reaching up to 500 pounds. These bears were nearly eliminated from unregulated killing in the late 1800s, as well as from habitat loss when Ozark forests were logged. However, a small number of native black bears survived and reintroduction efforts in Arkansas also helped to increase their numbers in southern Missouri. For more information on black bears in Missouri, visit the MDC online Field Guide at nature.mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/field-guide/american-black-bear.

MDC research shows most of the black bear population resides in the southern third of the state in the Missouri Ozarks, but Missouri's population is growing, and bears are moving into areas north of Interstate 44. Wandering bears have also been seen as far north as the Iowa-Missouri state line. For more information on MDC black-bear research, go online to research.mdc.mo.gov/project/missouri-black-bear-project

Black bears are currently a protected species in Missouri. MDC anticipates a limited hunting season as a population-management method once black bear numbers reach around 500 animals. The current estimate is about 350. To comment on MDC's draft black-bear management plan and black bears in Missouri, visit mdc.mo.gov/bears.