

# Service Proposes to Delist the Louisiana Black Bear

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On May 20th, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS or Service) proposed to delist the Louisiana black bear, one of 16 subspecies of American black bears. The proposal was trumpeted by the Interior Secretary Sally Jewell—who oversees FWS—and environmentalists as a prime example of how public-private partnerships can help to recover species protected by the ESA.

The black bear subspecies was listed under the ESA in 1992 due to high rates of habitat loss and human-related mortality. The bear population had fallen to about 100 and was split up between three known breeding groups in southern Louisiana. The Service worked with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, the University of Tennessee, private landowners, and others to reduce threats of habitat loss within the bear's range. That approach resulted in establishing additional breeding subpopulations and protecting or restoring more than 750,000 acres of habitat, principally through the efforts of private landowners.

The Louisiana black bear population is found in four main breeding groups in Louisiana and several additional satellite subpopulations in the Louisiana and Mississippi. According to a survey published by the U.S. Geological Survey last year, the population of Louisiana black bears has increased to between 450 and 600 bears.

The subspecies and its relationship to President Theodore Roosevelt are credited with creating the "Teddy bear" in the American culture. On a hunting trip to Mississippi in 1902, Roosevelt refused to shoot a Louisiana black bear cub, an event that resulted in editorial praise by the Washington Post cartoons and the sale of stuffed animals named

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for the future President.

The Service's proposal to delist the Louisiana black bear will be open for public comment for 60 days (through July 20th). If completed, the bear will be the 33rd species removed from the federal endangered and threatened species list as a result of recovery and notably the 13th such action during the Obama administration, which is the highest total for any Administration.