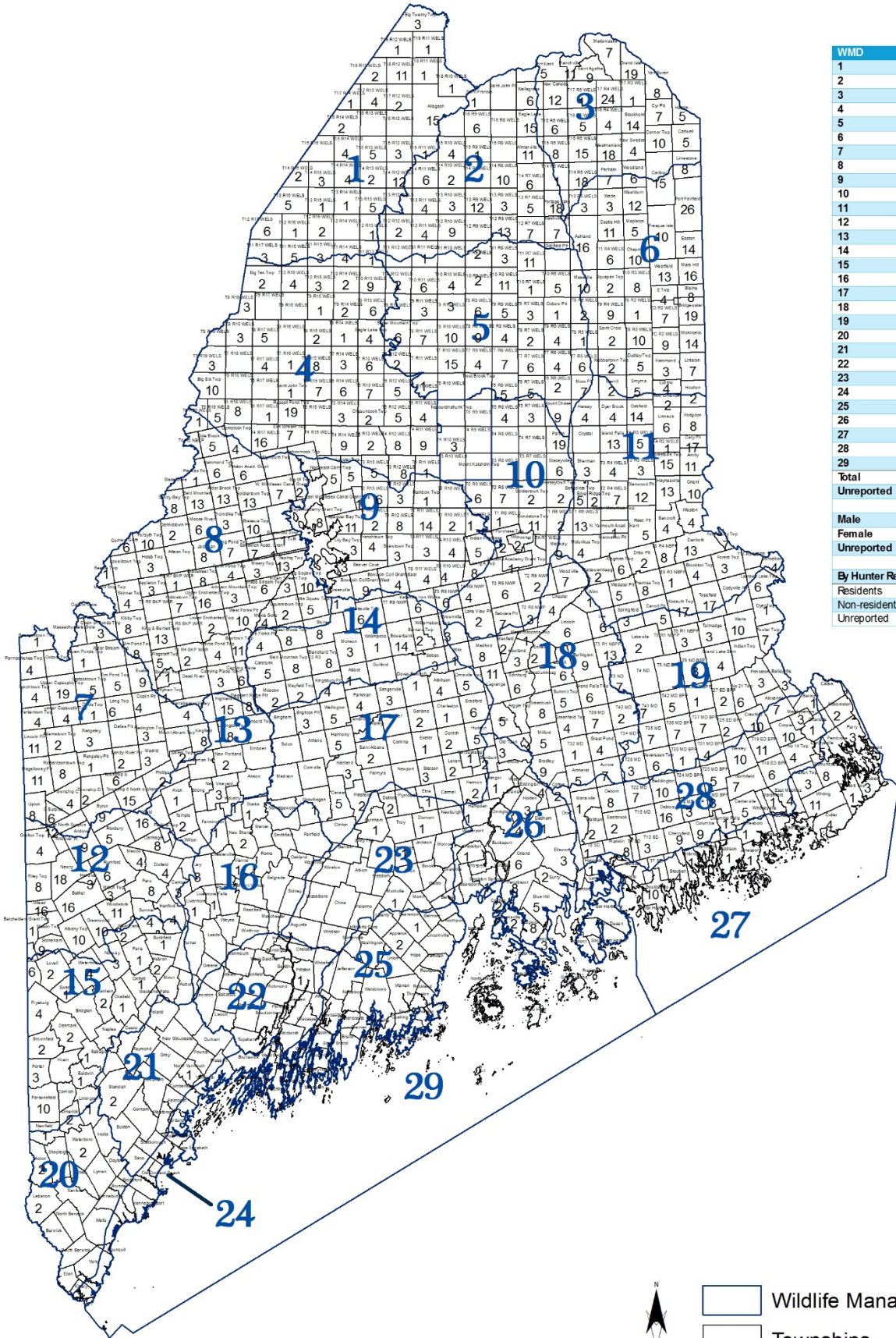


# 2023 Bear Harvest by Town



WMD	#bears
1	112
2	131
3	259
4	222
5	179
6	295
7	181
8	332
9	133
10	92
11	292
12	176
13	39
14	76
15	52
16	8
17	73
18	163
19	147
20	8
21	3
22	1
23	6
24	0
25	3
26	61
27	66
28	159
29	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3269</b>
<b>Unreported</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Male</b>	<b>1,800</b>
<b>Female</b>	<b>1,472</b>
<b>Unreported</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>By Hunter Residence</b>	
Residents	1,298
Non-residents	1,971
Unreported	3



Wildlife Management Districts  
 Townships

Map created:  
06/25/2024

## **Maine's 2023 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 28-September 23, 2023). The hound season overlaps the last two weeks of the bait season and continues through the following five weeks (September 11-October 27, 2023). 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. During the 2023 season, 63 youth hunters shot a bear on youth day, a near record high, and 59 hunters harvested 2 bears, a new record high since 2011.

Natural food abundance varies from year to year and can have a strong influence on the final harvest. This fall, we expected a higher abundance of natural foods crops and lower harvest. A lower percentage of bears were harvested over bait (62%) than in the previous year, likely due to the high abundance of natural foods throughout the year. The 2023 harvest reached 3,272 bears, which aligns with the previous ten-year average of ~3,200. Hunter participation remained high (~13,100 bear permits) with a high harvest by hound hunters (813 bears) and record high harvest by trappers (318 bears). 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 57 bears during the November deer season indicates that natural foods were abundant, with bears entering dens later.

### ***Geographic Distribution of the Harvest***

In 2023, bears were harvested in 14 of the state's 16 counties and in 27 of 29 WMDs. Although the highest harvest occurred in Aroostook County (1,053 bears, 32% 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 19 and 32 bears/100 mi<sup>2</sup> harvested in WMDs 3, 6, 12, and 28. Fewer bears were taken in southern portions of the State with only 2 to 8 bears harvested in Androscoggin, Cumberland, Kennebec, and Waldo counties and less than five bears/100 mi<sup>2</sup> harvested in WMD 16, 20, 22, 23, and 29. In all other WMDs, hunters harvested between 6 and 19 bears/100 mi<sup>2</sup> (statewide average of 11 bears/100 mi<sup>2</sup>). No bears were taken in Lincoln and Sagadahoc counties and in WMD 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 1,971 bears (60%) of the 3,272 bears tagged during 2023. Non-resident hunters shot more of the bears (65%) taken over bait and with the use of hounds (71%). However, hunting over bait remained popular among resident hunters with 55% 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 (88%, 81%, and 93% respectively) taken during those seasons.

### ***Assistance by Registered Maine Guides***

In 2023, guides assisted 384 residents (30%) and 1,836 non-residents (93%) with their successful hunts. Assistance by guides accounting for 87% of bears harvested with trained bear dogs, 70% of the bears taken over bait, 26% of trapped bears, 7% of bears taken by spot/stalk/still-hunt methods, and none of the bears taken while deer hunting.

### ***Sex and Age Distribution of the Harvest***

Males made up 55% (1,800 bears) of the 2023 harvest. Adult bears accounted for 95% (3,119 bears) of the harvest.

### ***Prospects for the 2024 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 2024 season will remain the same, opening with a youth day the last Saturday in August and closing the last Saturday in November. Successful hunts are influenced by a variety of factors, but natural food levels are often the most influential. When soft or hard mast crops are abundant, hunters hunting over bait experience lower success while deer hunters and hunters that pursue bears with hounds have greater opportunity as bears remain out foraging longer when natural food is abundant. Based on past alternate cycles in natural foods, we anticipate that the 2024 season will provide more opportunity to take a bear with the aid of bait and overall higher harvest but less opportunity to hunt over natural food sources or harvest a bear later in the season with bears entering dens earlier.