



Bear Education and Restoration Group of Mississippi

Annual Report

2007

Submitted by
Kevin Nelms, BEaR President
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Brief History

In the late 1990s, a group of interested individuals formed the Mississippi Black Bear Restoration Task Force (MBBRTF) as a committee of the Black Bear Conservation Committee (BBCC). The BBCC was formed to work with restoration of the Louisiana black bear (subspecies *luteolus*) in its historic range. After several years, it became apparent the MBBRTF needed to work with both subspecies (*luteolus* and *americanus*) having historic ranges in Mississippi. In November 2004, it was decided that MBBRTF should be dissolved and a new group formed separate from the BBCC. The Bear Education and Restoration Group of Mississippi (BEaR) was formed on November 30, 2004. BEaR received 501(c)(3) status in 2006, retroactive to August 2005. The BEaR bylaws were developed and adopted by membership vote on February 7, 2006. The mission of BEaR is to:

Support the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) in restoration and management of ecologically viable and socially acceptable black bear populations in Mississippi.

BEaR 2007 Projects

The bylaws establish a program and project based operation. All activities are managed within programs and a program is characterized by having a goal that directly addresses BEaR's mission statement. As of date, BEaR has identified four programs; administration, education, research and habitat, and human/bear conflicts. All finances are managed by projects that address specific programs. A project is characterized by having a specific objective, schedule, budget, labor, and leader. Members submit projects in standardized format for approval. Approved projects began in 2007 include:

Mississippi Black Bear SAFE – BEaR and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) jointly developed, submitted and got approved a State Acres For wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) project. The USDA, Farm Services Agency (FSA) administers the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) under the federal Farm Bill. The FSA began a new CCRP initiative in 2007 called SAFE to install practices that benefit high priority State wildlife objectives through the use of targeted restoration of vital habitats. Safe practices are used to restore threatened and endangered species habitat and/or habitat for species that have suffered a significant decline. SAFE will use the existing CCRP framework and be called practice CP38; only existing cropland is eligible. The Mississippi Black Bear SAFE developed by BEaR and TNC will restore 7,950 acres of cropland in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley to bottomland hardwoods and/or semi-permanent wetlands. These acres will be restored in the existing black bear habitat conservation priority areas to provide corridors and high quality bear habitat. The CCRP funded habitat project is approved for almost \$9.9 million. This project will remain active in 2008. Project Leaders: Stacey Shankle and Kevin Nelms

Great Delta Bear Affair – Again, BEaR partnered with the community of Rolling Fork to organize and conduct the annual festival. The festival and preceding youth education day are designed to raise public awareness of black bear, highlight the south Delta's natural resources, enhance community economics, and commemorate President Roosevelt's conservation legacy. BEaR brought the Sharkey County Soil and Water Conservation District on board to run the education day in 2007. This partnership worked so well, they have been invited back for 2008. The 2007 GDBA education day was attended by over 400 students and the festival had an attendance of over 7,000 and was reported as the best festival yet! Festival was named a "Top 20 Event" by the Southeast Tourism Society. Project leader: Meg Cooper and Tommy Shropshire

Entergy Grant – BEaR applied for and received an Environmental Stewardship Grant from Entergy in May for \$15,000. The grant was awarded to support black bear monitoring, habitat suitability evaluation, and public awareness. Part of this grant has been used to fund the educational display and aerial telemetry projects. Remaining funds will be used for other projects in 2008. Project Leader: Becky Rosamond

“Bears of Mississippi” Calendar – BEaR and the Mississippi Wildlife Federation (MWF) partnered to create and publish a full-color calendar featuring black bear cubs born in Mississippi. The calendar featured a different picture each month representing life history activities of bears. In this format, the calendar proceeds through a year in the life of a Mississippi bear. Short narrative descriptions for each month served to educate the public about bears, BEaR and MWF. The calendar was funded by Chevron and Weyerhaeuser making all sales a fundraiser for BEaR and MWF. Project Leader: Cathy Shropshire

Bear Crossing Highway Signs – BEaR partnered with Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) and MDWFP to design and install bear crossing signage in selected spots on state highways. BEaR coordinated with MDOT to develop a standardized sign design. MDWFP determined needed locations and MDOT installed signs. Signs have been installed in at least 10 locations. Signs will serve to alert motorists to possibility of bear/vehicle collisions as well as general awareness of bear populations. This project will remain active in 2008. Project Leaders: Stephanie Allison and Sabrina Chandler

Ongoing Projects in 2007

Website – BEaR commissioned the Digital Imaging Group of Flowood to design, develop, and host the official BEaR website. The website objectives are to educate the public about black bears in Mississippi, facilitate information transfer between BEaR, MDWFP, and United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and serve membership in organizational needs. The website project was partially funded by a grant from Mississippi Partners for Fish and Wildlife. Visit the website at www.msbear.org to learn more about BEaR and this project. This project will remain active in 2008. Project leader: Shauna Ginger

Educational Display - This professional informational display will be used by BEaR membership and MDWFP personnel to educate the public about bears in Mississippi. It will be erected at shows, festivals, extravaganzas, etc. as part of a booth space. This project is being funded by a grant from Entergy and will be completed in 2008. Project leader: Kevin Nelms and Bo Sloan

Print – An original artwork depicting a black bear and two cubs was printed as a full-color, limited edition of 100 signed and numbered prints. This project was developed as a BEaR fundraiser and Dr. Jeanne Jones again donated her talent and time to BEaR. The print is currently available unframed. The project will remain active in 2008. Project Leader: Connie Dickard and Sabrina Chandler

Aerial Telemetry – An ongoing study of radio-collared bears by MDWFP is a partnership with BEaR. Because of bear distribution and movement, location of radio collared bears is best achieved from the air. This project assists MDWFP with the high cost associated with contracting plane services while gathering valuable information about bear movement and habitat preferences. This project is being funded by a grant from Entergy and will remain active in 2008. Project leader: Brad Young

Other 2007 Accomplishments

Bear Cub Birth Celebration on WRP - In February 2007, the first black bears cubs were born in the Delta in over 30 years. These cubs were born on land owned by Hunter and Dan Fordice and enrolled in the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). USDA had a celebration of this momentous event on April 12, 2007. BEaR sponsored the event in partnership with USDA. The event was attended by many dignitaries including USDA Undersecretary of Agriculture Gary Mast. Vice-President Bo Sloan spoke on behalf of BEaR and the celebration was followed by refreshments provided by BEaR. An anonymous donor provided the funding on behalf of BEaR.

Support of BBCC Banquet and Fundraiser – BEaR donated one of the limited edition color prints by Jeanne Jones to the Black Bear Conservation Committee (BBCC). The print was framed and auctioned at the BBCC banquet as a fundraiser.

Press – BEaR received many favorable mentions in the press in 2007. Some include: Magazine articles on WRP cub birth celebration in Delta Wildlife and Jeanne Jones print in Mississippi Landmarks, newspaper articles on bear crossing signs in Memphis Commercial Appeal, Jackson Clarion Ledger, and Vicksburg Post, roaming bears in Cleveland News Leader and Leland Progress and WRP cub birth celebration in Vicksburg Post, newsletter article on Entergy Grant in EMI News. BEaR received much press as major sponsor of GDBA in magazines, newspapers, newsletters, radio spots, and billboards.

Meetings – BEaR held two annual meetings in 2007; one on February 13 in Lucedale and again on October 2 in Jackson. An annual board of directors meeting was also held on February 13 in Lucedale.

Membership – BEaR had 44 paid memberships in 2007. Memberships were 33 in 2006 and 45 in 2005.

2007 Officers

President – Kevin Nelms
Vice President – Bo Sloan
Secretary – Becky Rosamond
Treasurer – Stephanie Hodnett

2007 Board of Directors

Horace Allen, Coahoma County Landowner
Don Bales, Mississippi State Cooperative Extension Service
Brian Ballinger, Mississippi Fish and Wildlife Foundation
Trey Cooke, Delta Wildlife
Meg Cooper, Lower Delta Partnership
Ricky Cox, Issaquena County Landowner
Melissa Darden, Great Delta Bear Affair
Foster Dickard, Mississippi Forestry Association
Morgan Gullede, Leflore County Landowner
Matt Mallard, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Darren Miller, Weyerhaeuser
Jim Monk, Entergy
Tom Rosenblatt, Wilkinson County Landowner

Cathy Shropshire, Mississippi Wildlife Federation
Shaun Williamson, U.S. Forest Service

2007 Budget

Starting 2007	\$862.85		
2007 Deposits		\$23,389.49	
2007 Expenses			\$6,990.05
Ending 2007	\$17,271.29		