



June 1, 2023

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Re: Request to require all black bear hunters to complete a bear identification course

Dear Director Fredericks, Deputy Director Worthington and IDFG Commissioners:

In light of continued killings of grizzly bears by black bear hunters claiming mistaken identity, we are writing to ask that the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) revise

black bear hunting regulations to **require** all black bear hunters to complete a bear identification course to discern the difference between black and grizzly bears.

It is a hunter's responsibility to know their target and only pull the trigger when they are absolutely certain of the species at which they are aiming. Ethical hunting practices require basic wildlife identification skills to avoid illegal killing of non-target species, and most especially, protected species. Requiring an identification course for hunting black bears would help sharpen hunters' skills and could lead to fewer grizzlies being killed inadvertently by mistaken identity. This is a common-sense solution to a preventable problem.

During the years of 2010-2022, 14 grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem Recovery Area were killed because of mistaken identity according to the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team records that are maintained by the U.S. Geological Survey. Of those 14, the state of Idaho had at least 3 grizzly bear mortalities because of mistaken identity. Over that 12-year period, there were a total of 113 mortalities in the database that remain "under investigation." Without knowing how many of those are mistaken identity (this information is not available to the public), the incidence of grizzly bears being killed by black bear hunters is likely higher.

[The IDFG 2023 Fall/2024 Spring Black Bear Hunting Seasons and Rules](#) contain a graphic that states, "Grizzly bears and black bears both live in the state of Idaho. Avoid mistaken identity. Grizzly bears may be found in 3 areas of Idaho: The Panhandle in big game units 1, 2, 3, 4, 4A, 6, 7 and 9, The Clearwater Region in big game units 10, 12, 14, 15 16, 16A and 17, Southeast Idaho in the Yellowstone Ecosystem in big game units 60, 61, 62, 62A, 64, 65, 66 and 67." Next to this statement are two graphics of bears, one black bear and one grizzly bear profile with the main differences illustrated. Also listed are tracks of both species of bears and how to distinguish the difference between species. The web page to the Bear Identification Program is listed below the graphic with the words, "For more information please visit..." We appreciate the inclusion of this information into the regulations, however, no additional information about bear identification is shown in the season brochure. The Bear Identification Program training pages do have good photographic evidence of black bears and grizzly bears with detailed information about how to identify specific characteristics and features to help hunters properly identify different bear species. **However, there exists no requirement that hunters view these pages nor is a test required to provide an assessment of hunter knowledge of the differences between black bears and grizzlies.**

The state of Montana requires hunters to successfully complete [a bear identification course](#) along with a grade of 80% or higher (12 correct answers out of 15 multiple choice questions) on a test before they can obtain a black bear hunting license. Their course includes detailed descriptions and photographs that teach students how to distinguish black bears from grizzlies. Course materials also state, "As with all other aspects of hunting, it's the responsibility of the hunter to be sure of the species before pulling the trigger; claims of self-defense are exhaustively investigated. Remember, a mistaken identification may

impact not only the conservation status of bears, but may also result in more restrictive hunting regulations. Your ability to tell the species apart and to make sure that a black bear doesn't have young will directly influence the future of bear hunting and the public image of hunting in Montana. The decision to act responsibly is up to you!" A similar program including a mandatory bear identification test should be implemented in Idaho.

Grizzly bears are listed as threatened by the Endangered Species Act. Requiring a training course can help limit mortalities of grizzlies which will assist in their recovery. We thank you for your consideration of this request. If we can ever be of assistance, please know we are standing at the ready to help in any way. Please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

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Additional Feedback on IDFG Bear Hunting Seasons Listed in the IDFG Hunting Season Brochure

Delineating where grizzly bears may be found in the state of Idaho in the hunting brochure gives all hunters a general knowledge of the location of grizzly bears in Idaho. However, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the IDFG working on relocation of bears into the Bitterroot Recovery Area over the next several years, it is reasonable to expect that grizzlies will begin to occupy a larger area of the state than their current range. Therefore, hunters should be prepared for grizzlies in all hunt areas of the state as bears reclaim their former range in the Bitterroot, Selkirk, and Cabinet-Yaak Recovery Areas. It may behoove all hunters to be prepared to encounter grizzly bears throughout the state, not just in specific hunt areas. This may reduce the likelihood of grizzly bears being mistaken as black bears.

Grizzly Bear or Black Bear?

Grizzly bears and black bears both live in Idaho.

AVOID MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Grizzly bears may be found in 3 areas of Idaho:

- **The Panhandle** in big game units 1, 2, 3, 4, 4A, 6, 7 and 9
- **The Clearwater Region** in big game units 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 16A and 17
- **Southeast Idaho** in the Yellowstone Ecosystem in big game units 60, 61, 62, 62A, 64, 65, 66 and 67.

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE!



For more information please visit idfg.idaho.gov/hunt/bear-info/overview