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FINAL REPORT

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FEDERAL AID IN WILDLIFE RESTORATION ACT

TEXAS

Federal Aid Project No. W-103-R-19

NONGAME WILDLIFE INVESTIGATIONS

Job No. 68: Black Bear Status

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October 27, 1989

PROPERTY OF
Science and Resources Management
Big Bend National Park, Big Bend

FINAL REPORT

State: Texas Project No.: W-103-R-19
Project Title: Nongame Wildlife Investigations
Study Title: Black Bear Status
Period Covered: September 1, 1988 to August 31, 1989
Objective Number: 5 Job Number: 68

I. Objective:

To determine the current distribution and location of suitable habitat where restoration and management can be directed.

II. Background:

Black bears (Ursus americanus) were abundant and widely distributed throughout Texas prior to 1821 and Anglo-American colonization (Hall 1981). As human populations increased after colonization, the black bear population began to subsequently decrease. By the year 1900, black bears were restricted primarily to the rugged mountains of the Trans-Pecos, and southern portion of the Edwards Plateau, the remote river bottoms and thickets of the eastern Pineywoods, and to the Gulf Prairies and Marshes (Bailey 1905).

By 1940, the black bear was extirpated from the Edwards Plateau, reduced to relic populations in the Pineywoods, Gulf Prairies and Marshes, and to a remnant breeding population in the Trans-Pecos. It is believed the relic bear population in the Gulf Prairies and Marshes ecological area was extirpated by 1945. The last native bear of the eastern Pineywoods was believed to have been killed in the late 1950's in Polk County near the town of Livingston (Fleming 1980). The decline of the native black bear population in Texas was thought to be primarily attributed to its being hunted for food, sport, and predator control (Anonymous 1945).

In 1973, a status report was prepared on black bear in Texas and presented to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission. As a result of this report, the hunting season for bear was closed in all Texas counties under the Commission's regulatory authority.

In 1977, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department initiated the Black Bear Project under the Big Game Program (W-109-R) to determine the distribution of black bear and to evaluate bear habitat in Texas. Since 1983, the entire state of Texas has been under the regulatory authority of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission, and bear hunting has been prohibited throughout the state.

In 1987, the black bear was classified as an endangered species in Texas, and in 1988 the black bear was placed in Nongame Wildlife

County. These signs were located in Brushy Canyon and indicated the bear went into the Big Bend National Park. The sighting was classified as "Valid (verified)."

On December 1, 1988, a bear was reportedly observed in Bandera County 3 miles northeast of Bandera near Poly's Peak. The investigators considered this an "Invalid" observation. The investigators could find no evidence of bear and speculated that a feral hog probably had been sighted.

On November 3, 1988, a bear was reportedly observed in Smith County (northeast Texas) approximately 2 miles east of Hwy 69 South on Farm Road 346 at the Rockridge Subdivision. No bear signs were observed by the investigator and it was noted that the observer was "... a little uncertain about it being a bear." The investigator considered this an "Invalid" observation.

A bear was captured in a mountain lion trap on August 6, 1989 at the Mary Cox Ranch approximately 17 miles west of Sanderson in Brewster County. The bear was found entangled and dead in a tree with a leg hold trap on its front leg. The black-colored bear weighed 109 pounds and was 145 cm in length. It reportedly had been responsible for predation on domestic sheep. The sighting was classified as "Valid (verified)."

The Guadalupe National Park in Hudspeth and Culberson Counties was contacted to obtain information on black bear sightings. Park personnel reported 2 sightings of bear and 2 sightings of bear tracks. An adult female bear with 2 cubs was sighted on September 18, 1989 on the top of Smith Canyon and 1 adult bear was sighted in the "Bowl" area of the park on July 28, 1989. Tracks were seen on McKittrick Ridge on November 5, 1988 and near the mouth of McKittrick Canyon on May 25, 1989. Park personnel estimate the area to have a resident, breeding population of about 6 bears. The sightings were classified as "Valid (unverified)."

The Big Bend National Park in Brewster County was contacted to obtain black bear sighting reports. Resource Management personnel from the Park reported that 18 bears were sighted on 13 occasions, bear tracks were reported once, and there was 1 report of hearing a bear (the auditory report was not considered in compiling this data since it was not a sighting). At least 2 of the adult bears sighted were reported with young. All but 1 of the bear sightings were reported within the Chisos Mountains of the park. It is the opinion of park personnel that the black bears in Big Bend are an increasing, breeding population. The sightings were classified as "Valid (unverified)." See Table 1 for individual data.

Adequate data was not available to prepare a map of potential black bear habitat in Texas. However, a review of the habitat information, obtained from "VALID" bear observations investigated in Texas since 1977, indicates there is a relationship between the sightings and the following habitat characteristics: 1) forests or brushlands with a moderate to high vegetation density and diversity, 2) rolling, hilly, or mountainous topography, and 3) rural areas of low human population densities (less than 10 persons per square mile). Also, sightings are

Table 1. A summary of black bear observations in Texas, 1977-1989.

County	Date	Location	Investigator	Validity	Confirming data	Origin	Remarks
Angelina	May 78	17 mi. South of Lufkin	G. Spencer	VU	statement	migrant	juvenile, 70 lb. trapped
Reagan	Jul 78	12 mi. N.W. of Big Lake	W. Rice	VV	carcass	migrant	male, 300 lb., claws worn
Val Verde	Dec 77	N.W. of Pumpville	S. Sorola	VV	carcass	migrant	male, 225 lb., blk.
Frio	Nov 78	15 mi. W. of Dilly	J. Williams	VV	carcass	migrant	male, 298 lb., 59'9"
San Jacinto	Aug 79	N. of Cleveland	B. Hudgins	I	statement	unknown	described as adult male
Kendall	Jun 80	3 mi. E. Boerne	M. Dearing	VU	statement	migrant	adult, 300 lb.
Kendall	Jul 80	5 mi. S. of Boerne	M. Dearing	VV	tracks	migrant	adult, 300 lb., 5-6'
Tyler	Jul 80	E. of Warren	B. Borden	I	statement	unknown	described as 3' standing
Washington	Aug 80	17 mi. N.W. of Brenham	J. Yantis	I	statement	unknown	described as large & black
Morris	Sep 80	3 mi. E. of Daingerfield	J. Wallace	VV	captured	arkansas	female, 350 lb., returned
Harrison	Jan 81	11 mi. N.E. of Marshall	J. Wallace	I	statement	unknown	described as adult, black
Maverick	Feb 81	3 mi. E. of Eagle Pass	M. Hobson	VU	feces & statement	migrant	adult, 400-500 lb.
Polk	Aug 31	4 mi. W. of Leggett	K. Fleming	I	dog tracks	unknown	described as female with 2 cub
Smith	Apr 82	4 mi. W. of Whitehouse	K. Fitch	I	tracks	unknown	Only tracks reported
Culberson	May 82	"Bowl" of Quad. Nat. Pk	J. Wallace	VV	Statement	migrant	adult tracks near stock tank
Smith	Jun 83	1 mi. S. of Bullard	J. Wallace	I	tracks	unknown	Adult, 250 lb.
Walker	Nov 82	unknown	B. Hudgins	I	statement	unknown	described as female & cub
Zapata	May 83	21 mi. N.W. of Zapata	M. Hobson	VV	carcass	migrant	electrocuted climbing pole
Brewster	Sep 83	Black Gap W.M.A.	J. Cooke	VV	statement & tracks	migrant	adult & 1 unknown age
Brewster	Oct 83	Black Gap W.M.A.	J. Cooke	VV	statement & tracks	migrant	adult, 300 lb., tracked
Cass	Dec 83	7 mi. W. of Linden	J. Campo	VU	statement	unknown	described as black adult
Anderson	May 84	W. of Palestine	H. Haucke	I	tracks	unknown	canine tracks
Nacogdoches	Dec 84	W. of Attoyac Bayou	R. Oglesby	I	none	unknown	none
Shelby	Dec 84	S. of Arcadia	R. Oglesby	I	none	unknown	none
Travis	Oct 84	Austin residence	C. Winkler	VV	confiscated	unknown	released on Black Gap W.M.A.
Newton	Jan 86	Liberty Community	N. Dew	I	tracks	unknown	tracks misidentified
Terrell	Jul 87	1 mi. E. of Dryden	W. Russ	VV	carcass	migrant	Juv., male, 75 lb.
Val Verde	Jun 87	5 mi. W. of Langtry	S. Sorola	VU	statement	migrant	medium sized & scrawny
Brewster	Oct 87	15 mi. W. of Marathon	F. Luna	VV	photographs	migrant	male, adult, 350 lb., 5'
Freestone	May 88	8 mi. E. Fairfield	M. Watson	I	statement	unknown	probably a large dog
Shelby	Dec 87	Patroon area	G. Miller	VU	statement	migrant	male, adult, 350 lb., killed
Nacogdoches	Jan 88	5 mi. from Garrison	G. Miller	VU	statement	escaped	60 b. cub, hair worn off rump
Smith	Jan 88	2 mi. N. of Whitehouse	J. Wallace	I	statement	unknown	adult, seen in car headlights
Val Verde	Jun 88	12 mi. S.E. Del Rio	S. Sorola	VU	statement	migrant	125 lb. adult, black, poor
Bandera	Dec 88	3 mi., N.E. Bandera	S. Sorola	I	tracks	unknown	no tracks or signs
Brewster	Oct 88	Big Bend, Pine Canyon	C. Fleming	VU	statement	resident	1 bear
Brewster	Jan 89	Big Bend, Green Gulch	C. Fleming	VU	statement	resident	1 bear
Brewster	Feb 89	Big Bend, E. Paint Gap	C. Fleming	VU	statement	resident	1 bear
Brewster	Jun 89	Big Bend, Green Gulch	C. Fleming	VU	statement	resident	1 large bear

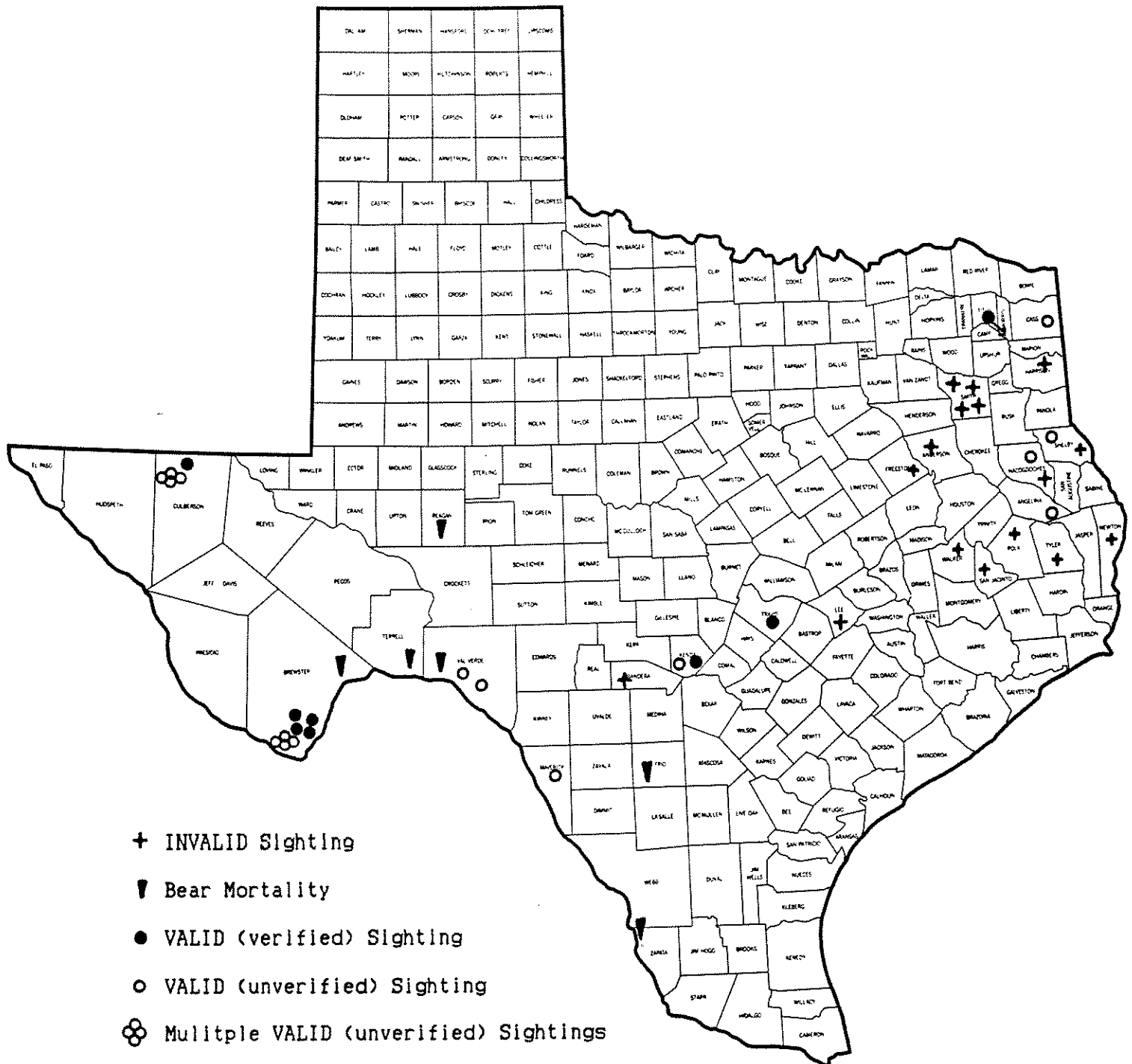


Figure 1. Investigated black bear sightings and mortality in Texas, 1977-89.

Appendix A

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT
BLACK BEAR INVESTIGATION REPORT

OBSERVATION DATA

Date Observed: _____ Time of Day Observed: _____ AM () PM ()

County: _____ Location (distance & direction from nearest town,
ranch name, etc.): _____

Habitat Description (vegetation, topography, etc.): _____

Observer (name/address/phone no.): _____

Did more than one person observe this bear? NO () YES () (if yes, record names and
addresses on back of form)

Activity of bear at time of observation: _____

Activity of observer(s) at time of observation: _____

Bear Sign Observed: tracks () scats () other (describe): _____

BEAR CHARACTERISTICS

Sex: _____ Age: adult () juvenile () cub ()

Length: _____ Weight: _____ lbs. Color: _____

Comments (indicate if measurements are actual or estimates): _____

EVALUATION DATA

What is your conclusion to the validity of this observation? VALID () NOT VALID ()

Explain: _____

Were any depredations attributed to this bear? NO () YES () (describe): _____

Describe fate of this bear after observation (killed, trapped, unknown, etc.): _____

What is your opinion of the origin of this bear (native, migrant, escaped zoo, etc.): _____

Investigated/Recorded by: _____ Date: _____

SEND COMPLETED REPORT TO THE NONGAME PROGRAM DIRECTOR in Austin.