



Celebrating Animals | Confronting Cruelty

## Testimony to the Assembly Committee on Sporting Heritage, in Opposition to Assembly Bill 30

Feb. 10, 2021

Dear Committee members:

I am Megan Nicholson, State Director for the Humane Society of the United States, and on behalf of our Wisconsin supporters, **we stand in opposition to AB30, which would ease black bear baiting** so that trophy bear hunters can more readily kill these highly sentient animals who are beloved by a majority of Wisconsin residents.

**Baiting bears** is *not* a solution for population management. In fact, sound science shows baiting unnaturally **increases Wisconsin's bear population**, according to a recent Wisconsin study.<sup>1</sup> This is common sense, as diet and nutrition are the most important factors driving bears' reproduction. The science is clear: Bears who have access to supplemental foods from human sources are more productive and cub survival increases. Females with access to human foods start reproduction *years* earlier than bears that rely only upon natural foods. When bears obtain human foods, the interval of time between litters decreases while the numbers of cubs increase. Furthermore, baiting is bad because it can amplify human-bear conflicts because it accustoms bears to human food and the smell of humans at bait sites.

According to Beringer et al. (2016), baits that contain toxic elements can lead to various negative outcomes such as death, thermoregulatory stress, suppression of the immune system, increased predation and the transference of toxins to young via lactation.<sup>2</sup> The physical effects are varied and include stimulation of the central nervous system, seizures, vomiting, heart arrhythmias and mortality.<sup>3</sup> Wildlife are exposed to theobromine (an element that contains caffeine) by consuming livestock feed, but more commonly through the consumption of waste food production used to specifically bait wildlife.<sup>4</sup>

### **i. Baiting bears creates enormous welfare problems**

- Baiting is considered unsporting, even among many sportsmen. It is not “fair chase,” the cornerstone of ethical hunting.<sup>5</sup> Bears readily consume baits set out for deer.<sup>6</sup>
- Bait piles make females with cubs vulnerable to trophy hunters, and cubs who are orphaned are less likely to survive.<sup>7</sup>
- Bait sites concentrate bears – putting young bears in harm's way. Adult bears may prey upon cubs or small bears.<sup>8</sup>
- Spoiled baits are also toxic and even fatal to bears and other wildlife.<sup>9</sup>
- Bait sites concentrate wildlife of different species and thus increase the potential for disease and parasite transmission between species, especially rabies and chronic wasting disease, and potentially mange.<sup>10</sup>

### **ii. Baiting increases human-bear conflicts (the opposite of Wisconsin's goals)**

- Outfitters and baiters place bait piles into the environment at the time when bears go into a frenzied eating behavior, called *hyperphagia*, in late summer or fall when bears need to gain 20 to 40 pounds per week to survive hibernation. Baiting habituates bears to human scents and can stimulate negative bear-human interactions.<sup>11</sup>
- Bears that become habituated to human foods become less shy and more unpredictable.<sup>12</sup> As a result of placing junk food in the woods, bears associate food with the smells of humans, and even livestock.<sup>13</sup> We cannot emphasize it enough: Feeding bears with bait (including bait for deer) increases the likelihood of conflicts.



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- Baited bears experience serious behavior modifications, which are sometimes irreversible.<sup>14</sup> Food-conditioned bears change their eating habits, home ranges, and movement patterns.<sup>15</sup>

### **iii. Baiting destroys habitats**

- Bait sites require ease of access and biologists have noted habitat destruction at these places, including the spread of invasive plants.<sup>16</sup>
- Bait piles are smelly and irritating to other outdoor recreationists (who could be in harm's way if they stumble unknowingly onto a bear-occupied bait site), and if they are near roadways, can endanger bears who travel near or on roadways to access bait piles.<sup>17</sup>

**More than a dozen peer-reviewed, published studies indicate that hunting bears does nothing to resolve conflicts.** Bear hunters do not target problem bears but are instead out in the woods trying to find the biggest trophy. Public education campaigns, on the other hand, can work to alleviate human-bear conflicts.

**Bear conflict mitigation for landowners involves employing commonsense, non-lethal solutions** across entire landscapes, such as using the right kind of electric fencing around calving and lambing pens, boneyards, stored animal feed and around crops. Other strategies include using bear-proof trash receptacles and creating secured dumps in rural communities.

**Black bears are an important umbrella species and are ecological actors who increase the biodiversity of their forest ecosystems.** They disperse seeds across vast distances—even more seeds than birds—open up canopies, and amend soils through their various behaviors. Black bears are one of the most photographed of wildlife in America.

**Trophy hunting is unpopular with most Americans.** A 2019 survey of Americans' values towards hunting, conducted by the pro-hunting groups, the National Shooting Sports Foundation and Responsive Management, found that 71 percent of Americans disapprove of trophy hunting.

For all of these reasons, we strongly urge you to vote “NO!” on AB30 and move to eliminate the cruelties involved with Wisconsin's trophy bear hunting practices.

## Sources cited:

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- <sup>5</sup> J. Posewitz, *Beyond Fair Chase: The Ethic and Tradition of Hunting* (Helena, Montana: Falcon Press, 1994); T. L. Teel, R. S. Krannich, and R. H. Schmidt, "Utah Stakeholders' Attitudes toward Selected Cougar and Black Bear Management Practices," *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 30, no. 1 (2002); C.W. Ryan, J.W. Edwards, and M.D. Duda, "West Virginia Residents: Attitudes and Opinions toward American Black Bear Hunting," *Ursus* 2, (2009); C. A. Loker and D. J. Decker, "Colorado Black Bear Hunting Referendum: What Was Behind the Vote?," *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 23, no. 3 (1995).
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- <sup>9</sup> Dunkley and Cattet, "A Comprehensive Review of the Ecological and Human Social Effects of Artificial Feeding and Baiting of Wildlife."
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid; Inslerman et al., "Baiting and Supplemental Feeding of Game Wildlife Species. The Wildlife Society." Amanda Sommerer, "A Spatial Analysis of the Relationship between the Occurrence of Mange in Pennsylvania's Black Bear Population and Impervious Land Cover" (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2014); Kirby, Macfarland, and Pauli, "Consumption of Intentional Food Subsidies by a Hunted Carnivore."
- <sup>11</sup> L. Dunkley and M. R. L. Cattet, "A Comprehensive Review of the Ecological and Human Social Effects of Artificial Feeding and Baiting of Wildlife," <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1020&context=icwdmccwhcnews> (2003); R.A. Inslerman et al., "Baiting and Supplemental Feeding of Game Wildlife Species. The Wildlife Society.," <http://wildlife.org/documents/technical-reviews/docs/Baiting06-1.pdf> , no. Technical Review. 58p. (2006); Kirby, Macfarland, and Pauli, "Consumption of Intentional Food Subsidies by a Hunted Carnivore."
- <sup>12</sup> Inslerman et al., "Baiting and Supplemental Feeding of Game Wildlife Species. The Wildlife Society.;" Dunkley and Cattet, "A Comprehensive Review of the Ecological and Human Social Effects of Artificial Feeding and Baiting of Wildlife."
- <sup>13</sup> Beck et al., "Sociological and Ethical Considerations of Black Bear Hunting." Inslerman et al., "Baiting and Supplemental Feeding of Game Wildlife Species. The Wildlife Society.;" Dunkley and Cattet, "A Comprehensive Review of the Ecological and Human Social Effects of Artificial Feeding and Baiting of Wildlife."
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