



A National Scenic Byway

Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway Newsletter

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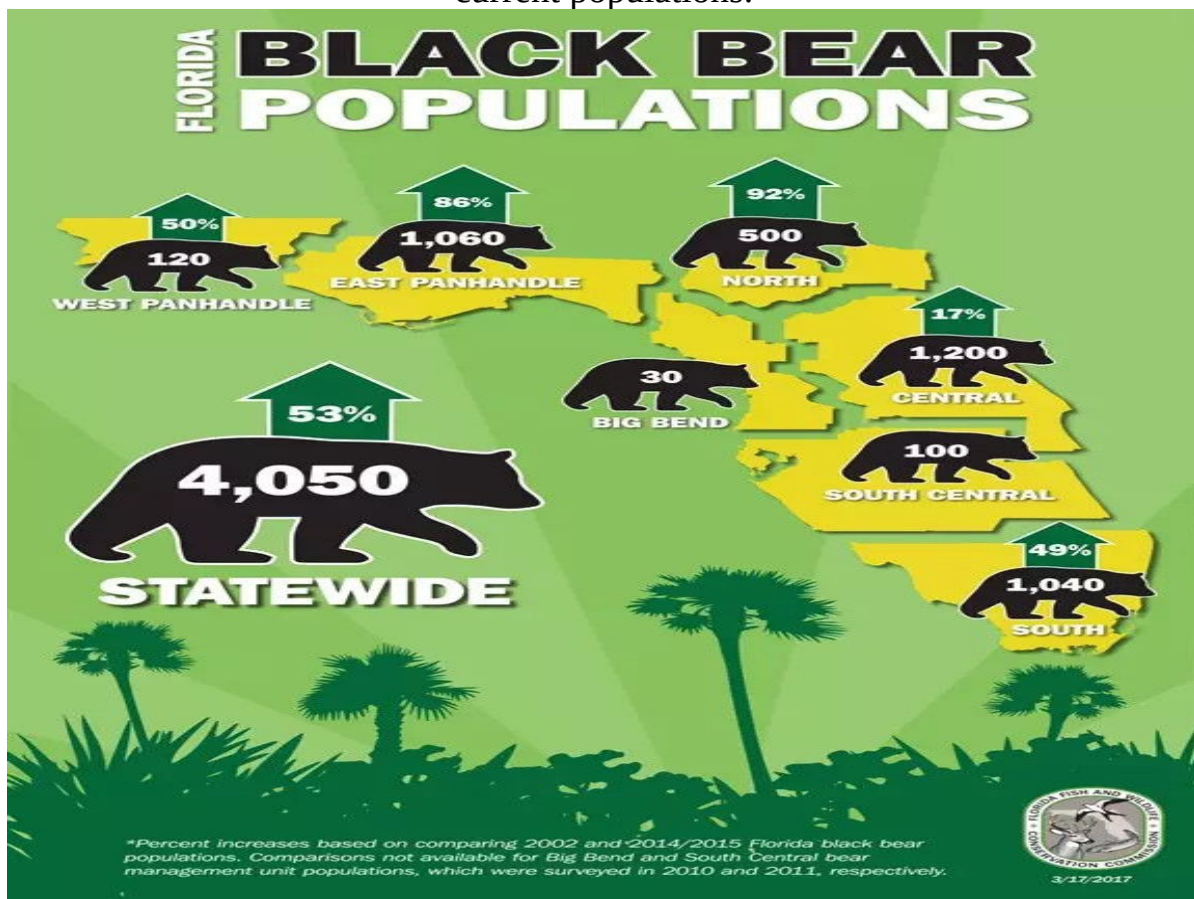


Florida Black Bear Populations and Wildlife Crossings

by Jim Thorsen

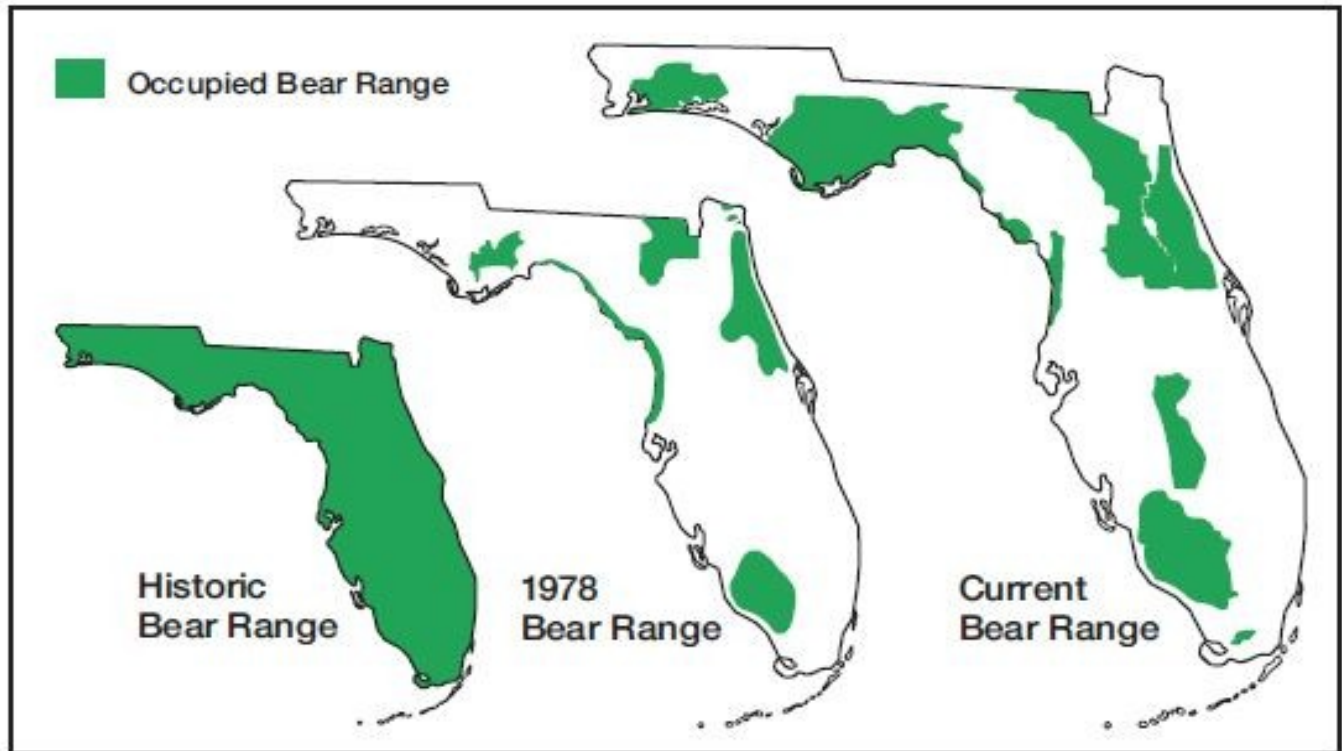
In the early 1800's, the Florida Black Bear (*Ursus americanus floridanus*) population in Florida was 11,000 to 12,000 bears. I remember when I became the District Ranger on the Ocala National Forest in 1989, our population on the Forest was approximately 100 Florida Black Bears. Over time, I begin to witness bears in the Forest and saw two to three cubs with “mama” bear roaming the woods and crossing roads. It was obvious the habitat was ideal; food was plentiful and the Forest was providing excellent reproduction for the bear species.

Today, we are glad to see that the populations have increased. This graph illustrates the current populations:



As you can see from this FWC report, the populations in Central Florida are increasing and the majority of the bears are located along the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway – State

Route 40 and State Route 19. Along with this good information, the FL Black Bear Range has increased in size.



This graph shows an estimated 38% bears occupying the State of Florida. The average “home range” of FL black bears is 10 to 25 square miles. Bears have the ability to navigate homeward from unfamiliar areas, which often brings them across dangerous roads. With habitat being replaced by growth and new housing developments, it is important to provide corridors for wildlife to travel. Since the bear population is increasing, it is critical that these core protected ranges are connected by wildlife crossings that will allow animals to move freely across the landscapes. Wildlife overpasses are the most effective wildlife crossing and benefit the largest number of species. On our Byway, State Road 40 and State Road 19 lead the State in black bear collisions and mortality. Currently, there are two overpasses in Volusia County on the four-lane part of the Byway (SR 40) that are being used effectively. The design plans to add four lanes on the East side of SR 40 and will have numerous wildlife crossings and three major overpasses in locations where wildlife normally cross the Byway. Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has completed the design and hopefully construction will happen soon. It is no doubt that wildlife crossings along our roads are critical and is a primary mission of our Byway to promote Florida wildlife to “get to the other side safely.” By supporting the prevalence of the Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway and by lobbying and advocating for building more wildlife crossings, our future Florida’s wildlife will continue to thrive for generations to come. To provide more wildlife crossings, leadership is a key factor and working with FDOT, land management agencies and conservation organizations can help initiate more wildlife crossings in Florida.

NOTE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN.....Jim Thorsen

Our organization is a challenge. However, we do have two new partners that we are excited to announce. Ocala National Forest Alliance (ONFA) and The Umatilla Museum and Historical Society have joined us to promote our mission. As we progress, these two organizations will be able to help us with possible grants and activities. I want to point out two important environmental dates that have made a difference on our planet:



- On April 22, 2024 is **Earth Day** which began in 1970. Earth Day is an annual event to demonstrate support for environmental protection. This day has become an international day promoting conservation and sustainability of our natural resources. Check your local community activity calendar for celebrations of Earth Day and receive valuable information to improve the health of our planet.
- Last year on December 28, 2023 marked 50 years when the **Endangered Species Act** was signed into law by President Richard Nixon. This act is one of the most important foundation conservation laws in our country. The act is still strong and has improved and saved many wildlife species that include our Florida Panther, Bald Eagle, Florida Black Bear, Alligators and many more.

We have been updating our website and we plan for this to be complete in the next thirty days. Please visit our website - floridablackbearsenicbyway.org for new information. Of course, we need support and new members and you will be able to join and support our Byway online. We appreciate all the effort of our volunteers and partnerships!!

Jim Thorsen, Chair thor1505@aol.com



Do you know the byway? Be the first to answer our byway question and win a Florida Black Bear Scenic Byway Tote Bag.

What are the full names of the 3 Marjories identified for their connection to the Ocklawaha River?

Email your answer to tomrose43@gmail.com

Congratulations to the previous contest winner, Tom King. Tom knew that it was Richard Nixon who put a stop to the barge canal project in 1971. I also received some great information from Florida Dept of Environmental Protection Park Manager Mickey Thomason regarding the canal: "The 1930's canal project was not the barge canal. It was a sea-level ship canal called the Gulf-Atlantic Ship Canal. That was funded in the mid 1930's via the federal government during the Great Depression. Funding was cut off a year later stopping that project. In 1942 after German Uboats were sinking merchant vessels off of Florida Congress modified the sea-level ship canal project to a shallow draft (12' min) barge canal project. No funding was available until the 1960's to start the barge canal in 1964. In 1971 Nixon stopped the project w an Executive Order that later was nullified as only Congress had that authority. However, by then the political winds had shifted and the canal was never again to be worked on in earnest."

Website & Facebook: Learn more about the byway at our website

<https://floridablackbearsenicbyway.org/> and Facebook page

<https://floridablackbearsenicbyway.org/facebook>

Next Meeting: April 9th

(Tuesday) 2PM at the Umatilla
Historical Museum 299 North
Trowell Ave. Umatilla, FL

Visitors are welcome. Attending
a board meeting is a great way to
learn more about the byway. Please
let us know if you plan to attend.
tomrose43@gmail.com



Florida Scenic Highways Annual Meeting March 7, 2024
Lakeside Inn - Mount Dora, Florida

Our Mission: *To enhance,
encourage and promote the
preservation and protection of the
outstanding natural, ecological, cultural and historical resources of the Florida Black
Bear Scenic Byway for its residents, inhabitants, visitors and future generations.*

Officers: Jim Thorsen, Chairman - Kristee Booth, Vice Chair - Nikki Thorsen,
Secretary

Editor: Tom Rose **Contact:** tomrose43@gmail.com. Your letters, comments,
suggestions and submissions are welcome.