Making a Difference for Wildlife

Hundreds of local conservation projects are undertaken annually by SCI Chapters. They are reinforced by many notable conservation initiatives funded by the SCI Foundation.

SCI FOUNDATION

Black Bear DNA Population Tracking
Michigan's Lower Peninsula
Total Funds: $8,500

With the advance of DNA identification technology, scientists have started to examine uses beyond those in law enforcement. Biologists already have begun, with a high degree of accuracy, to estimate grizzly bear populations throughout western North America.

Inspired by the success of these grizzly studies, Michigan Department of Natural Resources researchers are working to see if the same DNA identification techniques can accurately estimate black bear numbers in Michigan's Lower Peninsula.

"With the increase in human/bear encounters such as nuisance calls and increased number of harvest tags issued by DNR," advised DNR biologist Dwayne Etter, "we wanted to have a firmer estimate of the Lower Peninsula's bruin population. Now that the technology is affordable, we decided to make use of it."

This was a cooperative effort among the DNR, Michigan State University, US Forest Service, and the Little River, Little Traverse Bay and Grand Traverse Band of Odawa & Chippewa Tribes. The study was funded in part by the Michigan Involvement Committee, a collaboration of Michigan SCI Chapters that works routinely with MDNR on a variety of wildlife conservation issues, and the Michigan Bear Hunters Association.

The SCI Chapters of the MIC currently include: *Detroit, Flint, Michigan, Mid-Michigan, Northern, North East Michigan, Lakeshore Sportsmen, Lansing, Novi, North Woods, Great Lakes Muzzleloaders, Kensington Valley, South East Michigan Bow and West Michigan Bow.*

The summer field evaluation of the new method was completed in August, 2002. With the end of the 2002 black bear hunting season in October, researchers evaluated hair and tissue samples provided by successful sportsmen.

Etter adds, "The hair sample just needs to be a couple of hairs with the root attached. The easiest tissue to obtain is part of the tongue, and needs only to be about as big as the very end of your little finger. But any bit of muscle that is still fairly fresh and clean will do."

Data collected during past den checks on collared bears, thanks to on-the-ground assistance by the MIC, are used indirectly in the DNA study.