

www.baltimoresun.com/sports/outdoors/bal-sp.bearhunt27oct27,0,3768085.story

baltimoresun.com

Black bear hunting season begins in Md.

35 taken on state's opening day

By Candus Thomson

candy.thomson@baltsun.com

October 27, 2009

OAKLAND

Successful bear hunts run in Yvonne Taft's family. Last year, her husband and son-in-law each shot a bear.

This year, it was Taft's turn, and she made the most of it.

Less than an hour into Maryland's sixth black bear hunt Monday morning, the Essex woman and her husband were walking along a trail on Garrett County's Meadow Mountain on the way to their hunting spot when a 232-pound bear ambled out of the woods to their left. It crossed the trail, stopped and looked at them.

Her gun was unloaded. Dennis Taft handed his wife his rifle and said, "Go for it."

Yvonne Taft took aim and fired. The bear took a few steps and dropped. It was among the first of 35 bears taken on opening day.

"Believe it or not, I wasn't nervous," said Taft, who works for the Maryland Transportation Authority in the E-ZPass program.



Her husband and her son-in-law, Joshua Harris, couldn't stop grinning, even though the bear was more than 30 pounds heavier than their bruins last year.

The family will fill the freezer.

Protected by a half-century hunting moratorium, the Maryland bear population has rebounded from near extinction. The Department of Natural Resources census estimates the number of bruins - adults, adolescents and cubs - in Western Maryland at more than 600. Hunters arriving at the two check stations reported seeing numerous bears.

"The population is thriving. It's the wonderful habitat," said Harry Spiker, DNR's lead bear biologist. "It's a regionwide trend in the Eastern United States and Canada. Our second-growth forest has matured into a veritable banquet for bears."

The state has set a target of 60 to 85 bears in Garrett and Allegany counties for the season that ends no later than Oct. 31. Hunters shot 56 bears last year and 51 in 2007. A record 3,613 applicants entered the lottery for the 240 permits issued in September.

The record bear, taken two years ago, weighed 615 pounds.

Bruins are pushing eastward from Garrett and Allegany counties as their numbers grow and their habitat shrinks. Last year there were sightings in 14 of 23 counties; biologists had to trap young bears in Arbutus and in Centreville on the Eastern Shore and relocate them to Washington County.

Monday morning dawned still and crisp, perfect for opening day. By midmorning, hunters began arriving at the check station at Mount Nebo Wildlife Management Area in trucks of all sizes, and even one Honda station wagon hauling a 131-pound bear behind the back seat.

Mark Matysek, a retired Baltimore City police lieutenant, conceded that he almost stayed in bed.

"I didn't have any confidence that I was going to see anything," he said.

His hunting buddy, Curtis Moore, persuaded him to go out to their scouted spot in Garrett State Forest.

"I was looking to my left when I heard a snap," Matysek recalled. "I saw a black form, and my heart started pounding. It was behind a tree, and it took a few steps. When I could make a good, clean ethical shot, I touched it off."

The bear, weighing 117 pounds, will be turned into stew and chili, he said.

DNR biologists weighed each bear, took DNA samples and tested for West Nile virus.

Moore, a retired Baltimore police sergeant who has a weekend home just outside Oakland, said he has been surprised how quickly bears have filled the Western Maryland landscape.

"I've been up here for 20 years. The first 10 years, you didn't see any bears," he said. "Now, you see them all over the place."

Copyright © 2009, [The Baltimore Sun](#)