

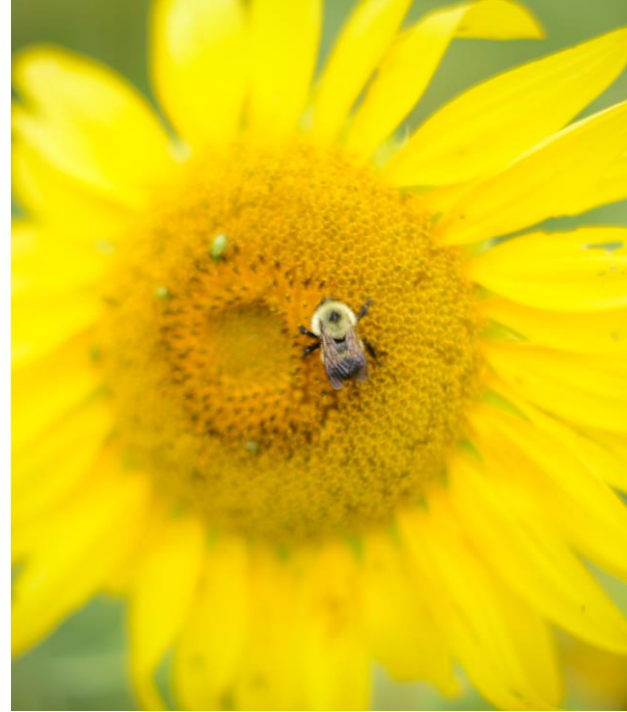


# Living with Black Bears

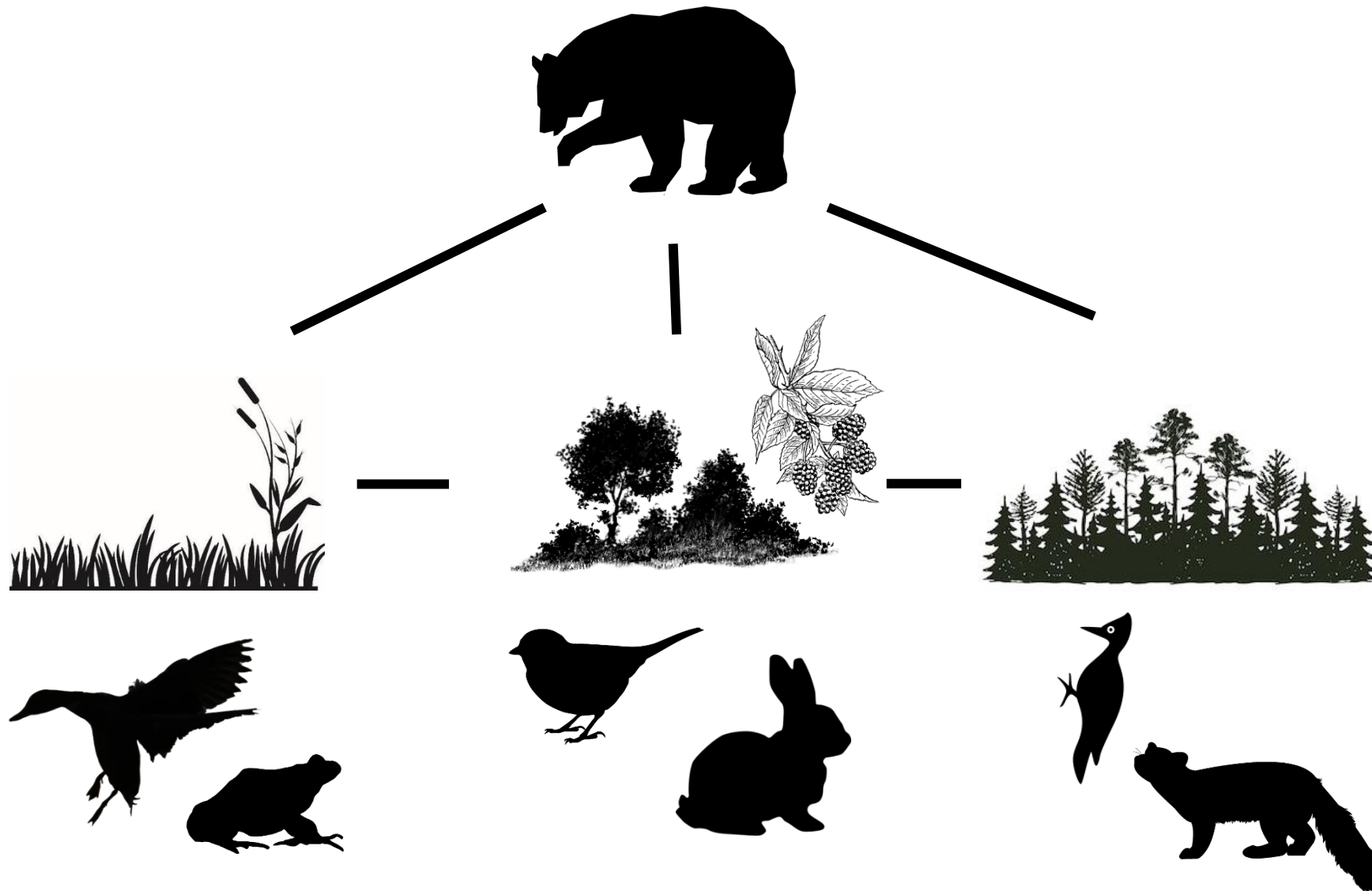
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Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department  
Jaclyn Comeau

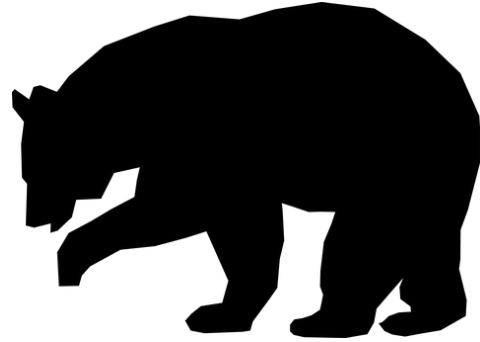




*The mission of the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department is the conservation of our fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the people of Vermont*



Black Bears are an Umbrella Species



# Get to Know Black Bears

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- Long lived
- Intelligent
- Powerful sense of smell
- Opportunistic omnivore







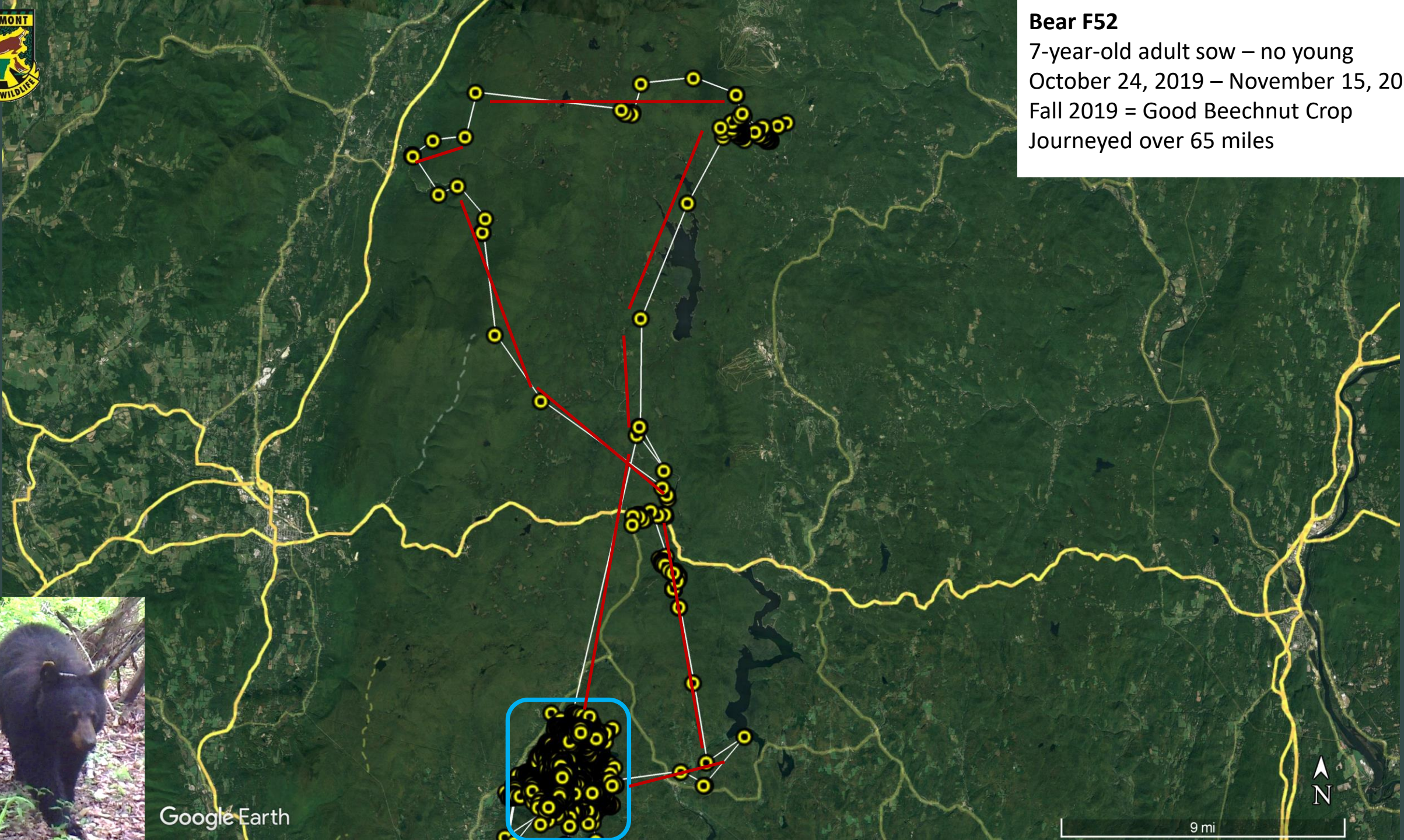






### Bear F52

7-year-old adult sow – no young  
October 24, 2019 – November 15, 2019  
Fall 2019 = Good Beechnut Crop  
Journeyed over 65 miles



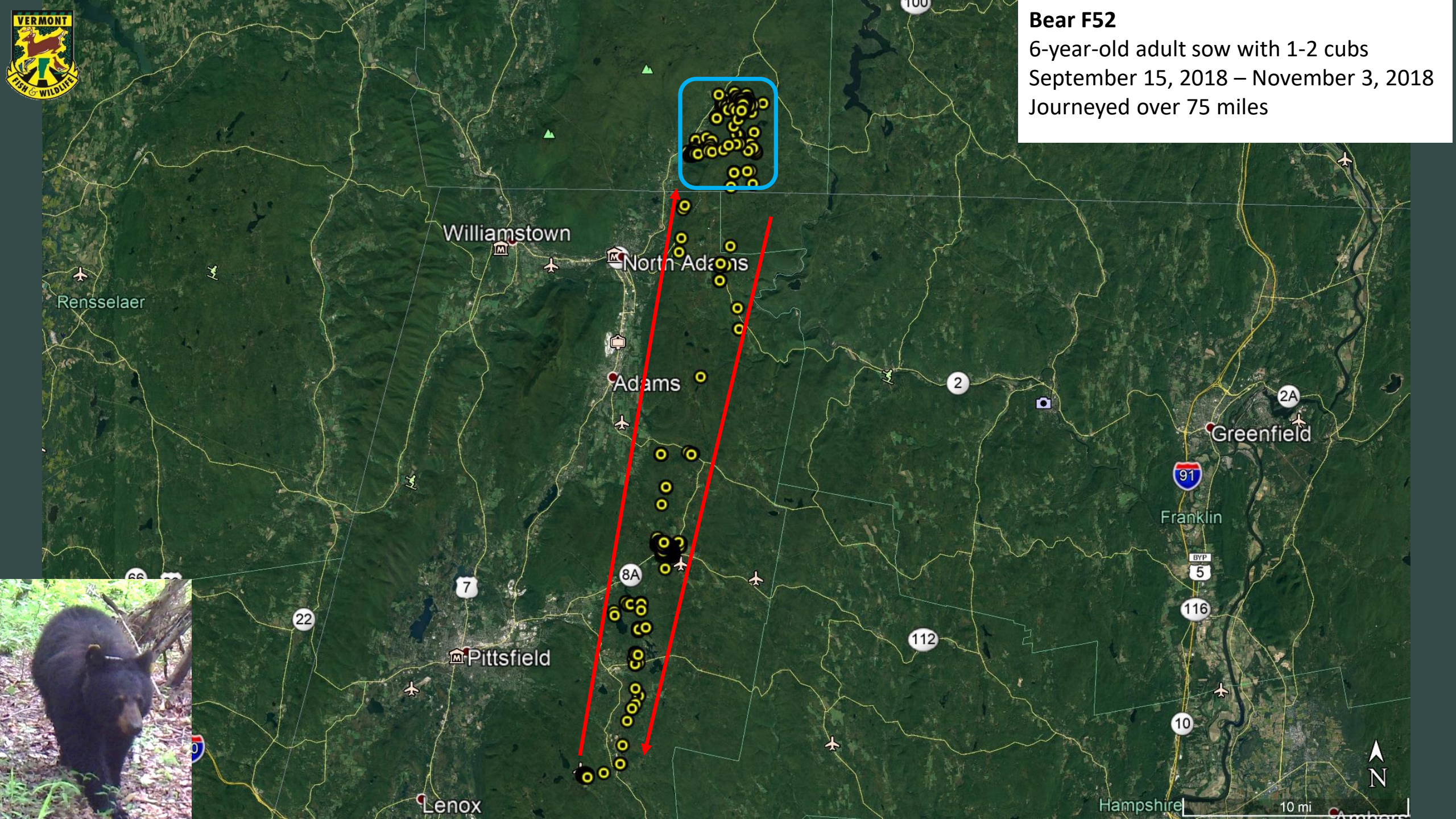
Google Earth

9 mi





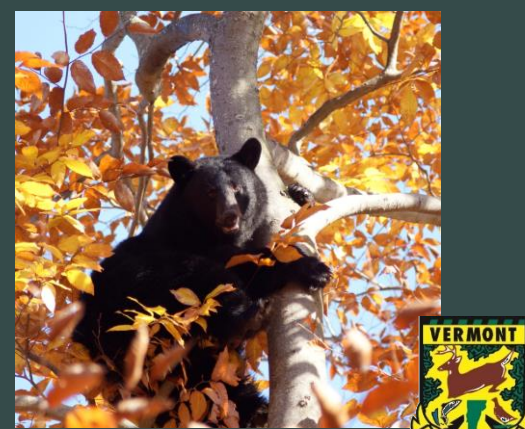
**Bear F52**  
6-year-old adult sow with 1-2 cubs  
September 15, 2018 – November 3, 2018  
Journeyed over 75 miles



10 mi







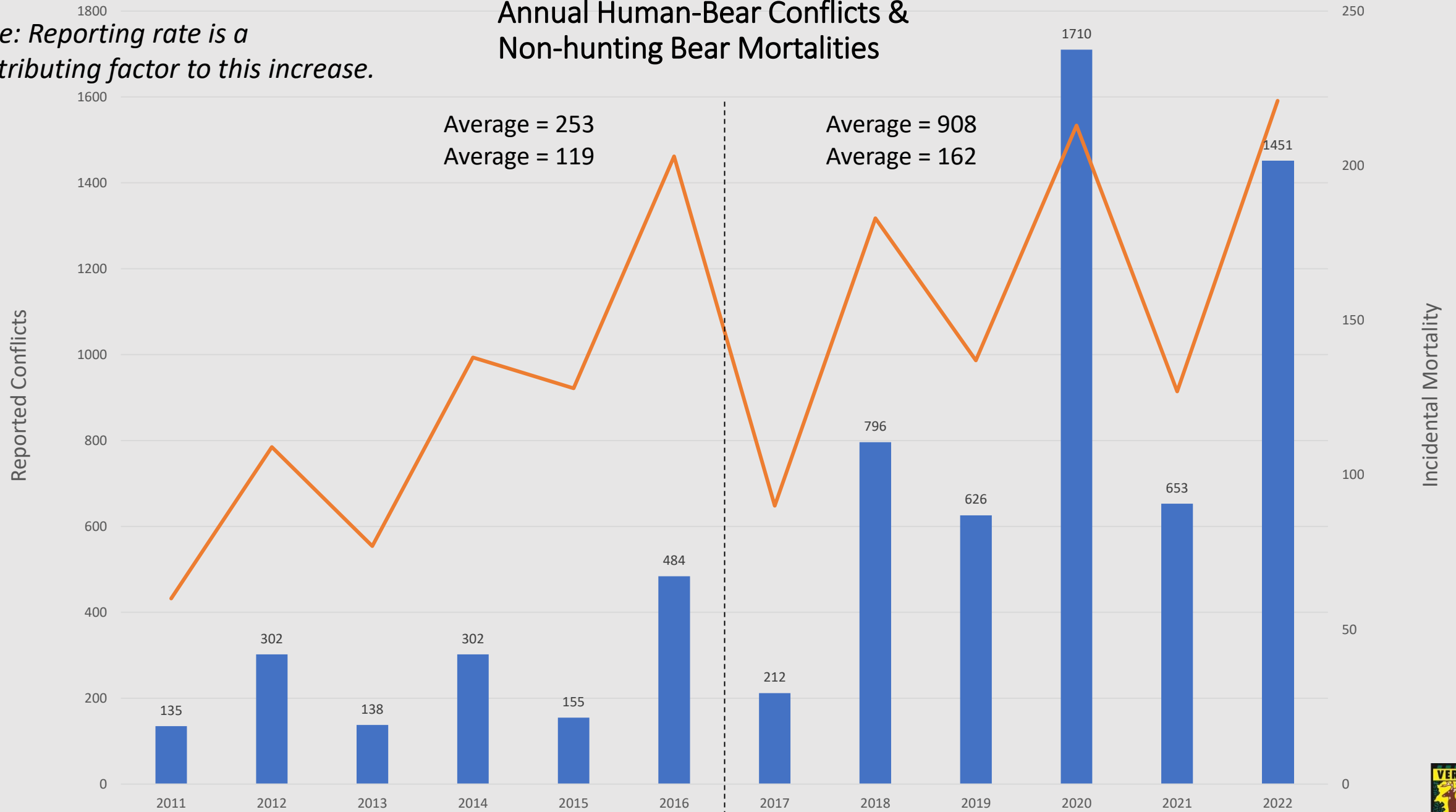


*"I shouldn't, but I'm going to have the garbage."*



*Note: Reporting rate is a contributing factor to this increase.*

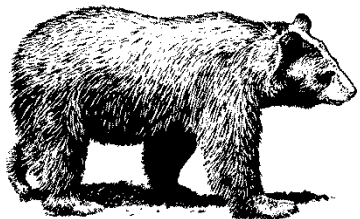
# Annual Human-Bear Conflicts & Non-hunting Bear Mortalities



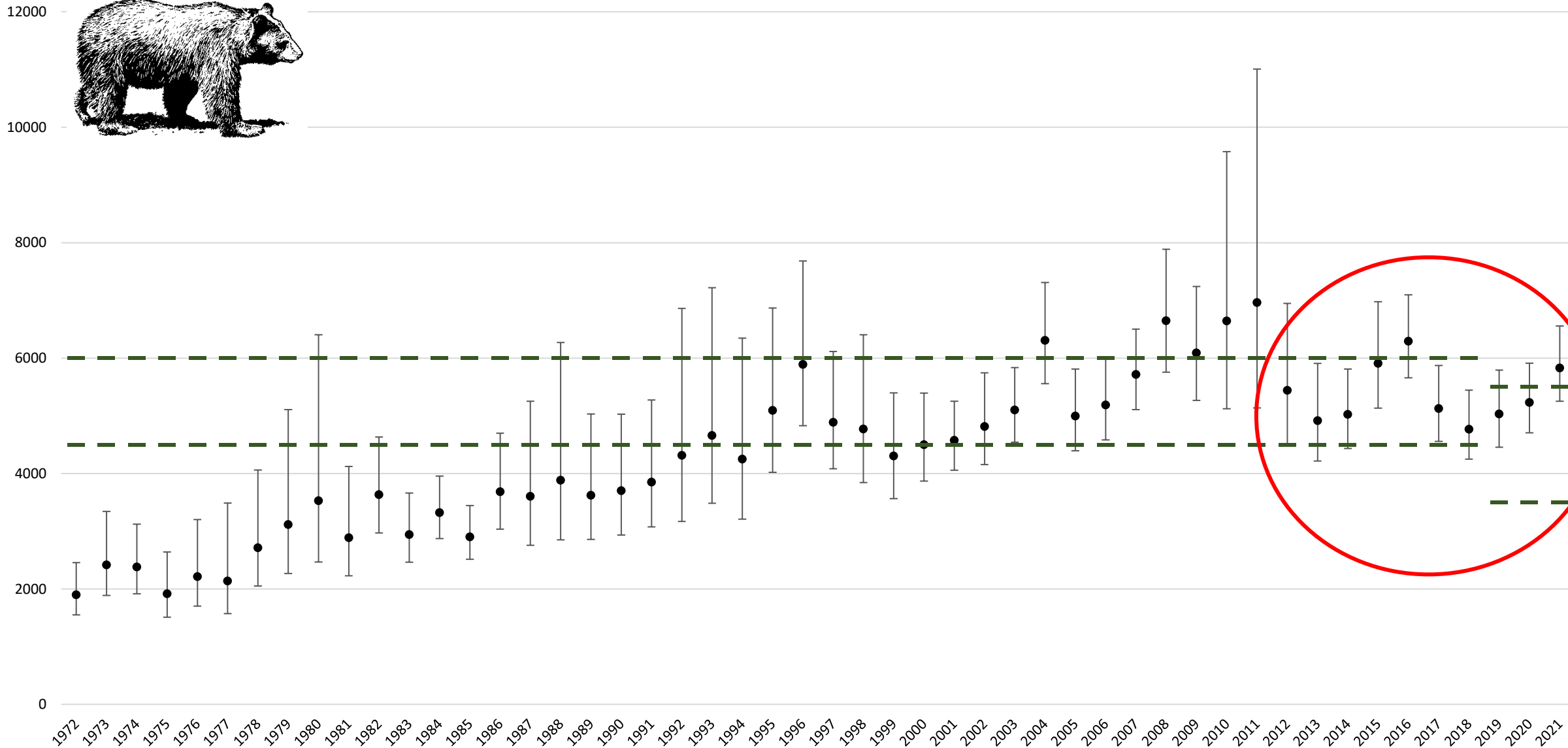
# What is driving human-bear conflicts?

## 1. The Number of Bears

*Note: The size of VT's bear population is a contributing factor, but we have lived with this many bears in the past.*



Vermont bear population estimate (mean  $\pm$  80% confidence intervals)





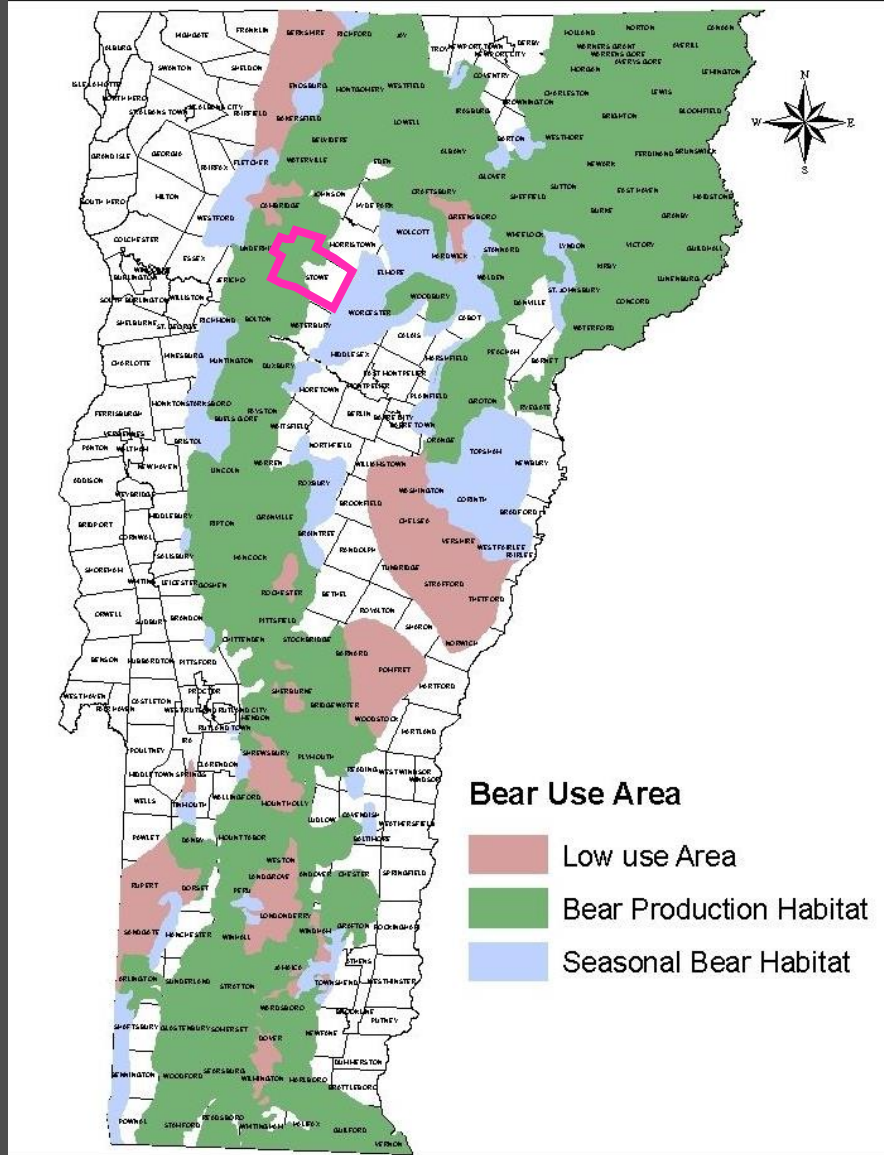
# What is driving human-bear conflicts?

## 2. The Distribution of Bears

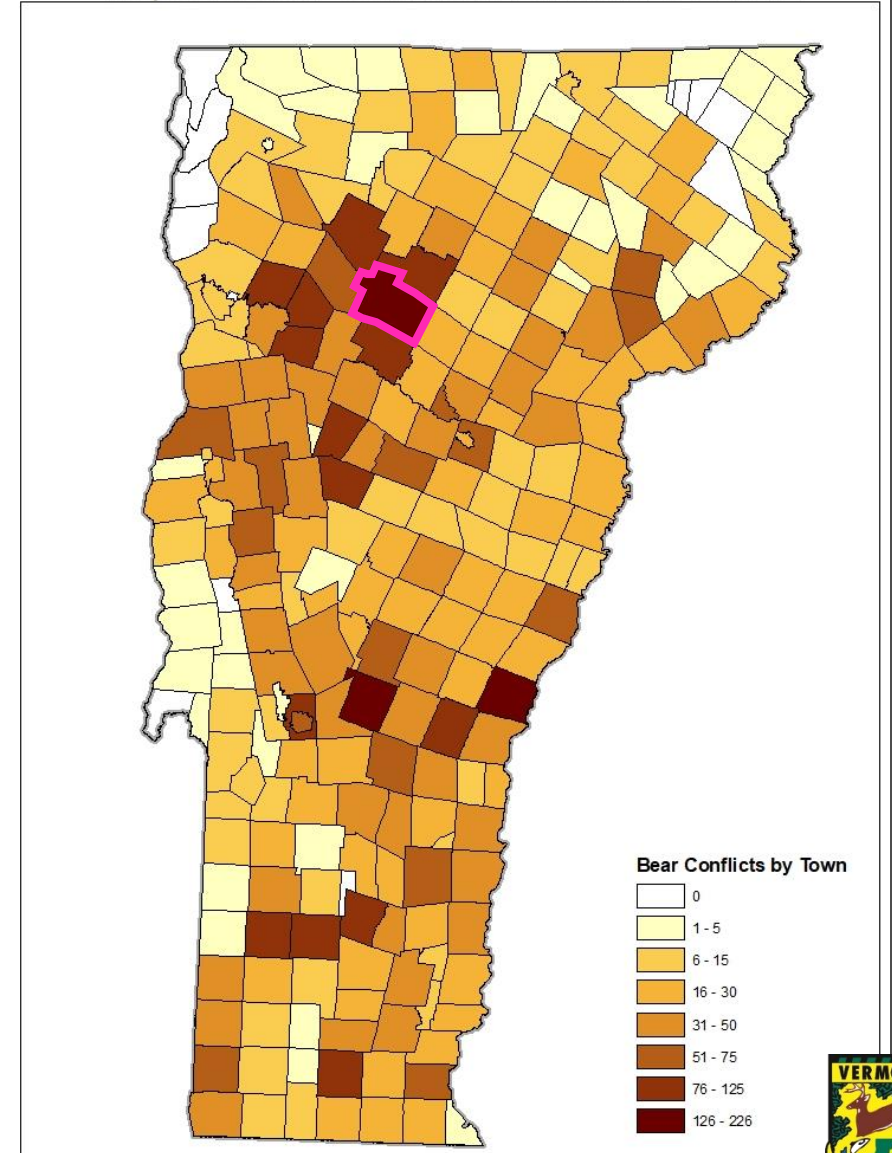


Note: Many Vermonter's are new to living in bear country.

### Black Bear Habitat in Vermont 1989



### Reported Bear Conflicts in Vermont, 2011-2022



*What is driving human-bear conflicts?*

### 3. Bear Behavior

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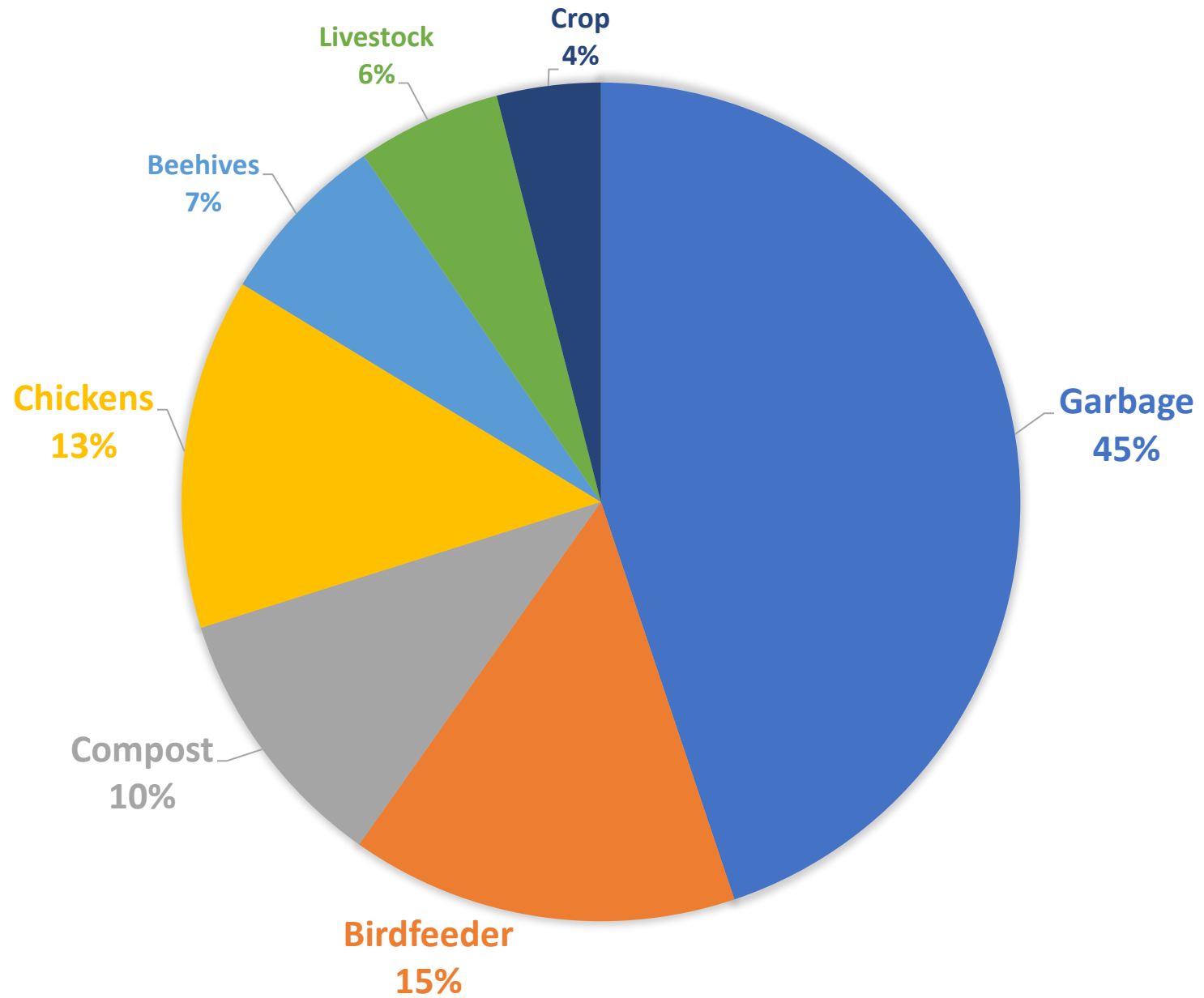
## Every Meal Is A Learning Experience!

- Lack of natural foods
- Curiosity to discover new foods
- Food conditioning
  - *reliance on human foods*
- Habituation
  - *lack of wariness around people*



# What is driving human-bear conflicts?

## 4. Easy Access to Human Foods



Human Foods Involved in Human-Bear Conflicts, 2011-2022



*Note: Most bear incidents are seemingly benign, but when allowed to fester some will escalate. We (all Vermonters) need to do more to intervene early.*



## What Can We Do?

- Manage the number of bears – *VT's bear hunting season is maintaining a stable bear population and that is the goal.*
- Try to manage bear behavior – *the abundance of positive food rewards outweigh our ability to apply meaningful negative experiences.*
- Change people behavior – *the most effective solution is to make human foods unavailable.*

Bears are active in your community. Take action:



# HELP KEEP BEARS WILD

## NEVER FEED BEARS

it's illegal!

### SECURE GARBAGE, COMPOST, & FOODS

behind closed doors or in bear-proof bins

### BE LOUD

make bears feel uncomfortable

### USE ELECTRIC FENCES

for chickens and other farm animals

### TAKE DOWN ALL BIRDFEEDERS

Learn more and report bear encounters:



vtfishandwildlife.com



## Composting in Bear Country

Composting well protects animals and people because it reduces the chance that you will accidentally feed an animal.



**Take down birdfeeders**, except when bears are hibernating. Bird seed draws bears into yards. Plant native flowers and shrubs that attract birds instead.



**Compost in a hard, durable bin**, ideally with a lid that would be challenging for a bear to open. Cover all food scraps with "browns" (dried yard debris, wood chips, sawdust, or shredded paper); they help contain odor. Frequently mix the pile.



**Don't compost meat and bones** at home. Bring them to a compost drop-off or put them in the trash.



**You have options!** You can bring food scraps to transfer stations and other local drop-offs. Consider drop offs in the spring when bears are most active.



### Curious Bear? Don't Feed It.

1. **Contact Vermont Fish & Wildlife** for more advice on deterring a bear in your yard **before it becomes a problem**. Fill out this form to get in touch: [Anrweb.vt.gov/FWD/FW/WildlifeBearReport.aspx](http://Anrweb.vt.gov/FWD/FW/WildlifeBearReport.aspx)

2. Bring food scraps to a drop-off for a while **OR** Surround your bin with an electric fence (smear peanut butter on the fence so the bear gets a little zap to the face).

- Home
- Hunt
- Fish
- Conserve
- Licenses and Lotteries
- Watch Wildlife
- Get Involved

#### Learn More

- Conservation Education
- Living with Wildlife
- Living with Black Bears**
  - Bear-Resistant Trash Containers
  - Composting in Bear Country
  - If You Encounter A Bear
  - Living with Black Bears FAQs
  - Bear Necessities: Living With Black Bears

## Living with Black Bears



Seeing black bears in their natural surroundings is exciting. But when bears venture into human territory, problems can occur and bears

[Click Here to Report a Bear Incident](#)

### Human-Bear Conflicts: A Fed Bear is a Dead Bear

People often encourage bears to come out of the forest by providing food without realizing it. When bears become used to these food sources with humans they become more dependent on human foods and less wary. This is bad news for the bears. This puts bears at increased risk of being killed in defense of property.

The most common sources of food that attract bears are: **pet food, bird feeders, barbecue grills, garbage, household trash containers with accessible food and food wastes.**

Purposely feeding a bear is not just bad for the bear, **it's also illegal.**

If you need immediate assistance dealing with an unsafe bear situation, please [contact your local game warden](#).

Have any questions? Please visit our website for more information at VT Fish&Wildlife's [Citizen Reporting](#) information page or feel free to contact VFWD Wildlife at [jaclyn.comeau@vermont.gov](mailto:jaclyn.comeau@vermont.gov) or (802) 461-5620.

Required fields are marked with \*

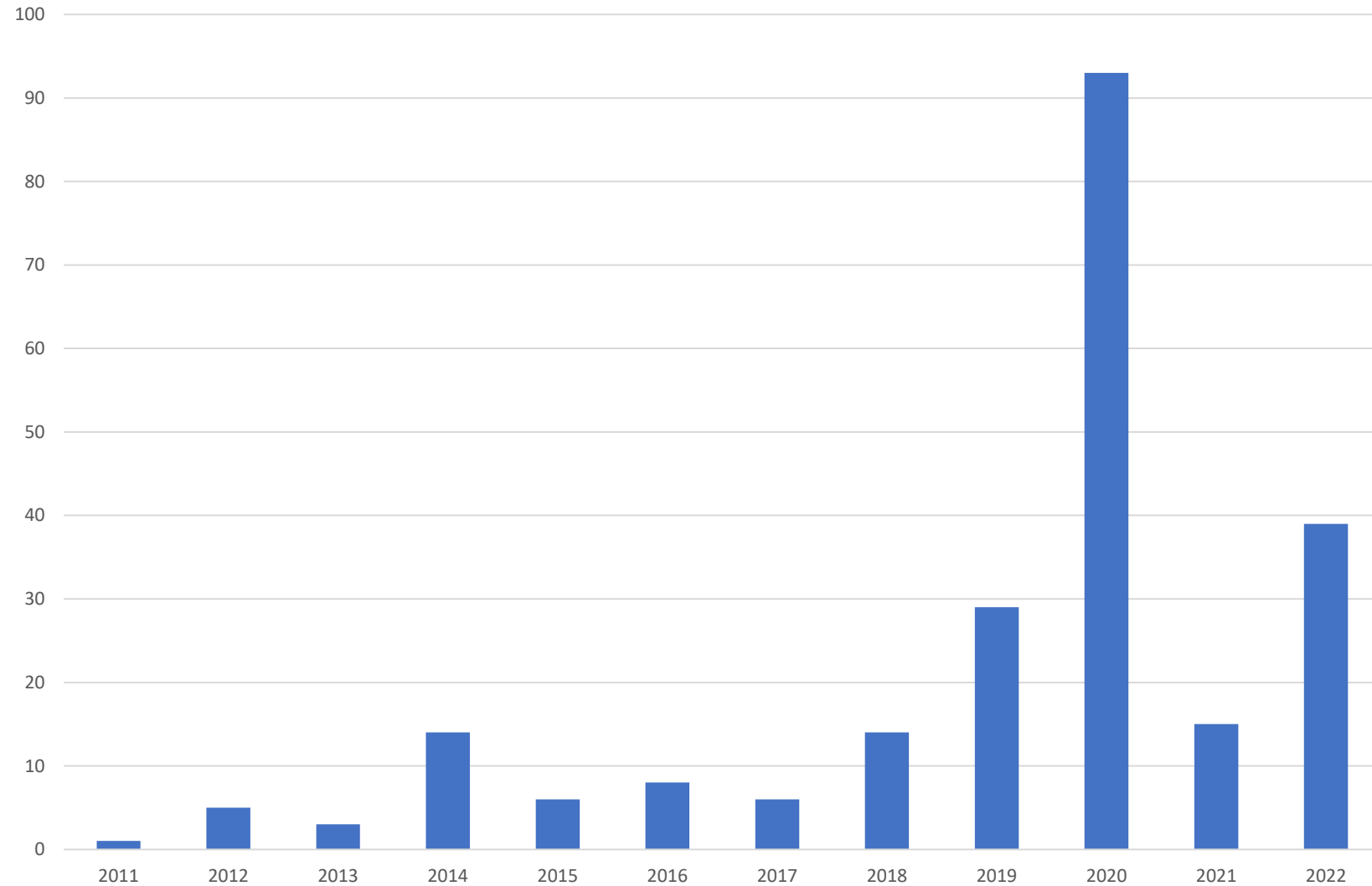
RESET

### ENCOUNTER CONTEXT

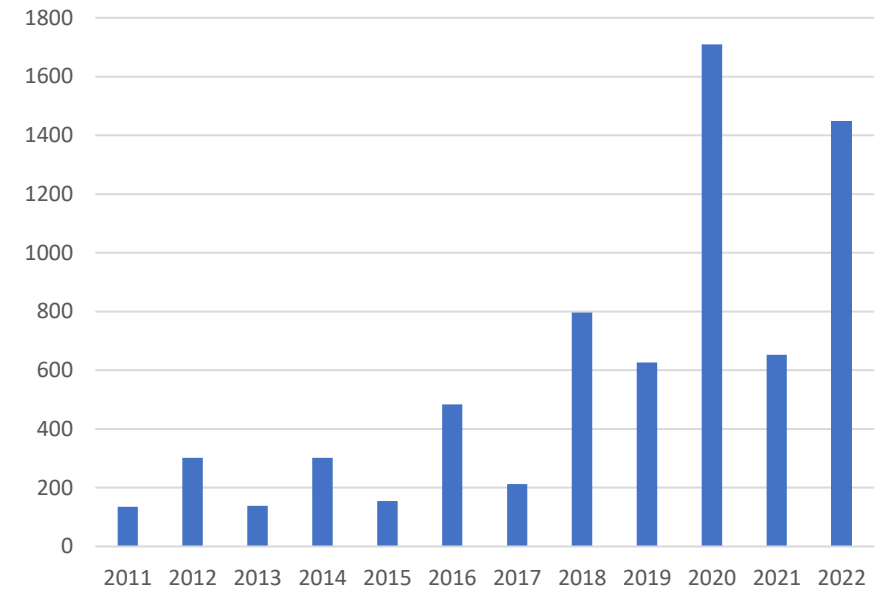
In which type of setting did your bear incident occur? \*

- Yard / Neighborhood / In Town
- Camping / Campground / Picnic Area
- Recreation Trails

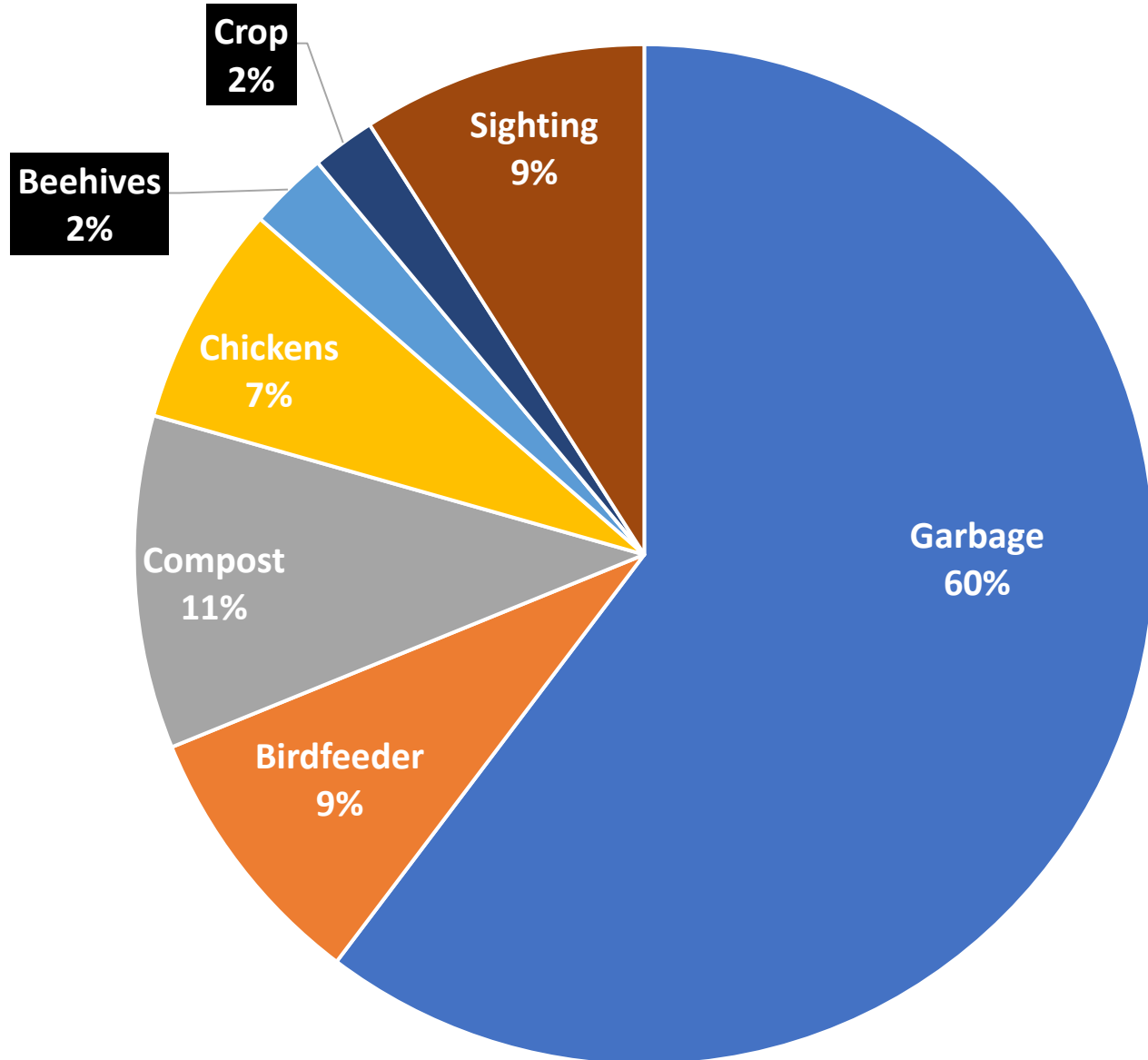
# Stowe Reported Bear Incidents = 233



### Vermont, 2011-2022

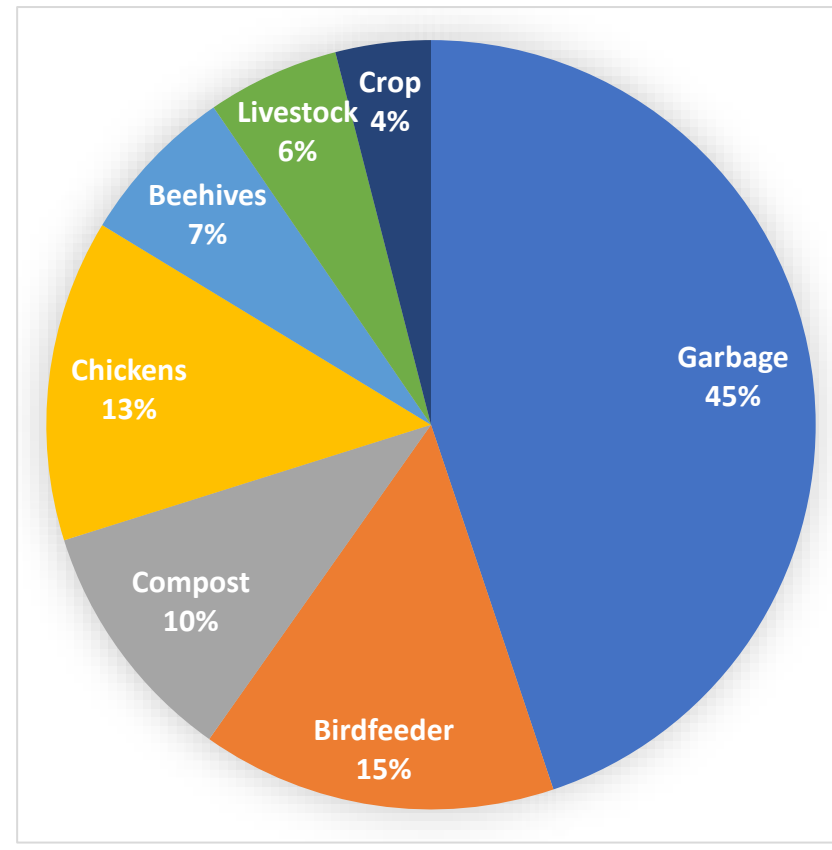


# Stowe, 2011-2022



Livestock, 0%

# Vermont, 2011-2022







Birdfeeders – the gateway drug!





## Don't Feed Birds When Bears Are Active!

- Attract Birds with Native Plants Instead!
- Audubon's Native Plants for Birds Program  
<https://www.audubon.org/native-plants>





Don't Trash Vermont's Bears!

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# Odor Control & Secure Storage



- **Secure Storage is Key!**

- Store in building
- Store in bear resistant containers

- **Odor Control**

- Frequent trips to transfer station
- Freeze smelly food scraps
- Ammonia

# Insist on Bear Proof Dumpsters

## BEAR-RESISTANT DUMPSTERS

Common components of a bear-proof dumpster are all metal or metal- reinforced plastic lids and clips to keep doors securely closed. A dumpster with a reinforced plastic lid must also have a lock bar to be bear-resistant.



## NOT BEAR-RESISTANT

Dumpsters with plastic lids not reinforced with metal are not bear-resistant, even if they have a lock bar.



# Composting in Bear Country

## Odor Control & Secure Storage

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### Proper Compost Recipe:

- 3 Parts Brown Materials
  - Leaves, paper, sawdust/wood chips, hay, etc.
  
- 1 Part Green Materials
  - kitchen scraps, grass, etc.
  
- No Meat & Dairy





Protect Bees, Chickens  
and Bears with a Zap!

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# Securing Garbage is Effective at Reducing Bear Conflicts

**When ~60% of residents use Bear Resistant garbage storage conflicts drop significantly**



Hunt

Fish

Conserve

Licenses and Lotteries

Watch Wildlife

Get Involved

Learn More

Conservation Education

Living with Wildlife

Living with Black Bears

→ Bear-Resistant Trash Containers

→ Composting in Bear Country

If You Encounter A Bear

Living with Black Bears FAQs

Bear Necessities: Living With Black Bears Videos

→ Protect Your Property with a Zap

Got Bats?

Injured and Orphaned Wildlife

Human-Wildlife Conflicts Resources

Wildlife Diseases

Animal Importation and Possession Rules

Roadkill Procedure

→ Landowner Resources

Vermont Critters

Vermont Plants

Fish & Wildlife Library

## LIVING WITH BLACK BEARS



*Seeing black bears in their natural surroundings is exciting. But when bears venture into human territory, problems can occur and bears often pay the price.*

[CLICK HERE TO REPORT A BEAR INCIDENT](#)

### Human-Bear Conflicts: A Fed Bear is a Dead Bear

People often encourage bears to come out of the forest by providing food without realizing it. When bears become used to these food sources and have frequent contact with humans they become more dependent on human foods and less wary. This is bad news for the bears. This puts bears at increased risk to vehicle collisions and of being killed in defense of property.

The most common sources of food that attract bears are: **pet food, bird feeders, barbecue grills, garbage, household trash containers, open dumpsters, and campsites with accessible food and food wastes.**

Purposely feeding a bear is not just bad for the bear, **it's also illegal.**

If you see a bear in a residential area or you encounter an aggressive bear, please contact the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department.

### Protecting Your Home and Property

Vermonters must take reasonable measures to protect their property from bears before lethal force can be taken. Some of these measures include:

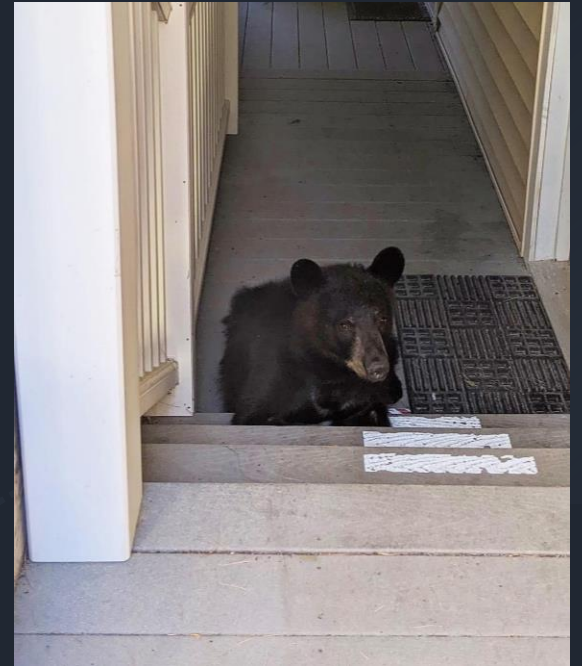
- Keep chickens and honeybees secure within an electric fence or other bear-proof enclosure.

# For More Information

[www.vtfishandwildlife.com](http://www.vtfishandwildlife.com)

[www.BearWise.org](http://www.BearWise.org)





“People ... must accept that they are participants in the natural world, not mere observers.”

*-David Baron, The Beast In The Garden*

