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Tuesday August 17, 2004

## Poll shows opposition to bear hunt

by DAVID DISHNEAU/Associated Press Writer

A poll sponsored by The Fund for Animals found that 57 percent of Maryland voters oppose the black bear hunt planned for this fall, the wildlife protection group said Monday.

A state-sponsored poll conducted two months earlier produced an apparently contradictory finding. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources said Monday that the Fund for Animals' survey was misleading.

The DNR plans to adopt rules next week for the proposed hunt in the state's far western panhandle during the weeks of Oct. 25 to 30 and Dec. 6 to 11. It would be Maryland's first bear hunt in 51 years.

Fund for Animals President Michael Markarian said the new survey shows Maryland voters want to retain the hunting ban.

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"Governor (Robert) Ehrlich and all state officials now know that the voters will hold them responsible if they allow our bears to be hunted for trophies and bearskin rugs this October," Markarian said.

The survey by Annapolis-based Gonzales Research & Marketing Strategies was based on telephone interviews last week with 847 registered voters in Maryland who vote regularly, according to

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Gonzales.

The margin of error was plus or minus 3.5 percentage points, Gonzales said.

The key question was: "Black bears were once hunted to near extinction in Maryland, but after a half-century of protection, they have made a comeback and established a small population of a few hundred bears in the western part of the state. The state of Maryland now proposes allowing recreational trophy hunters to kill black bears for the first time in more than 50 years, beginning this October. Do you strongly favor, moderately favor, moderately oppose, or strongly oppose the hunting of black bears in Maryland?"

Statewide, 36 percent said they strongly opposed bear hunting and 21 percent expressed moderate opposition.

The findings appear to conflict with those of a poll announced July 12 by the DNR, in which 65 percent of respondents - all Maryland residents but not necessarily registered voters - said they supported hunting as a bear-management tool. In that survey, respondents were asked: "Do you support or oppose regulated hunting as a way to control black bear populations in Maryland?"

Paul Peditto, director of the DNR's Wildlife and Heritage Service, said the Fund for Animals' question was "purposely misleading" to produce an anti-hunting response.

Besides, Peditto said, "the proposal to manage bears with limited hunting is not based on public opinion surveys or political ramifications. It's a scientific proposal. It always has been."

The proposed hunt would target 30 bears in the mountains of Garrett and Allegany counties west of Cumberland. The DNR estimates that 400 bears live in that area, and that 100 more live elsewhere in the state.

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On the Net:

The Fund for Animals: [www.marylandbears.com](http://www.marylandbears.com)

Department of Natural Resources: [www.dnr.state.md.us](http://www.dnr.state.md.us)

