

# PERSPECTIVE

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## MAN AND BEAST

### The spring bear hunt isn't fair: End it

By Holmes Rolston III

Special to The Denver Post

**T**he Colorado Wildlife Commission should protect nursing bears and their cubs by voting to end the spring bear hunt, a hunt that began April 1 and will end May 15.

More than 9,000 Colorado citizens, including hunters, signed a petition last year that called for an end to the spring hunt and to the use of dogs or bait. The commission, which is appointed by the governor to set Division of Wildlife policies, responded late last year by reducing the spring hunt two weeks and by implementing a bear-management plan.

Because most of the bears are killed in the latter part of the season, reducing the hunt was a move in the right direction, but the spring season still is six weeks long and endangers the lives of cubs unable to fend for themselves.

Although nearly all hunters follow the law that prohibits them from hunting nursing sows, more often than not they cannot tell whether the bear they kill is a nursing mother.

Colorado Division of Wildlife records show that hunters kill 550 to 700 bears

during the two hunting seasons each year and that nearly 40 percent of the bears killed are females. Because the record of kills is taken over such a wide area and involves so many division personnel, it will be several weeks before this season's totals will be available. But in the past the division has estimated that 20 to 25 of the females are lactating. Estimates indicate that if each lactating female that is shot has two cubs, 50 cubs could starve to death annually.

In addition to the bears killed legally each year, wildlife experts estimate that poachers illegally kill hundreds more. Many others are killed by landowners who are permitted to protect their livestock. The total losses run well over 1,000 annually. A pertinent question then is "Do legalized hunts stress the population of Colorado's black bears?" Some state bear biologists say yes, that the Colorado bear population cannot sustain this loss indefinitely, and especially when reproducing females are being shot. Bears are the slowest of our large animals to recover from population losses.

If the Colorado Wildlife Commission allowed only a fall season, bear populations

would not be as stressed and cubs would be old enough to survive if their mothers were killed.

I also urge the commission to go one step further and vote to outlaw the use of bait or dogs to hunt Colorado's black bears. This already has been done in Montana, where hunters maintain a good success rate. In fact, no Eastern state permits hunts with bait or dogs.

Use of bait and dogs gives an enormous advantage to the hunter.

Bear hunts should be limited to the fall season, as are hunts for deer, elk and other big game. In no other hunt do we shoot mothers that are nursing or have young unable to fend for themselves. Remember too that, unlike deer and elk hunts, bear hunting is done largely for trophy. Does Colorado want to be known as a state where nursing mothers are shot for recreation?

The Colorado Wildlife Commission should abolish the spring black-bear hunt.

*Holmes Rolston III is a professor of philosophy at Colorado State University, where he teaches environmental ethics.*



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**UP A TREE:** The black bear has long been in the sights of Colorado big game hunters, but are also a concern of ethicists.