

By Brad Young, Black Bear Program Leader  
& Daniel Sumerall, The Nature Conservancy

## Mississippi Black Bears Get SAFE

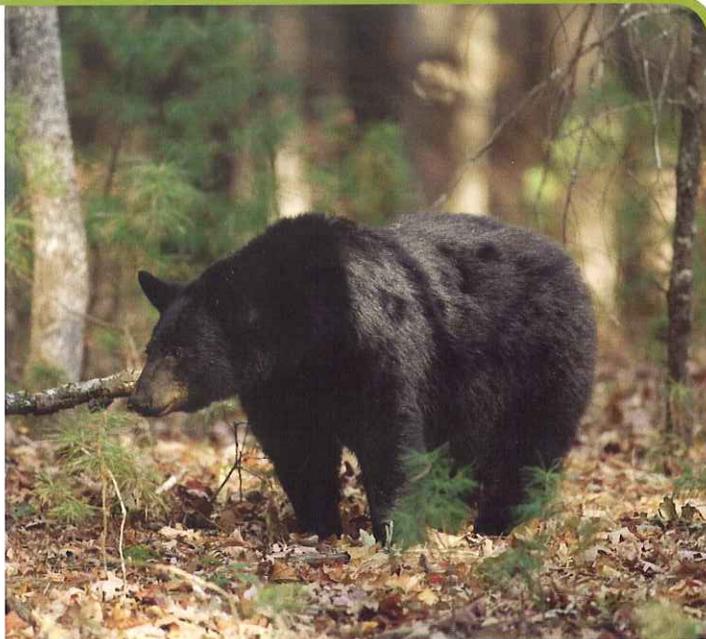
**M**ISSISSIPPI LANDOWNERS CAN now earn incentives by enrolling eligible cropland into a new program designed to restore habitat for black bears. Mississippi was granted funding to restore 7,950 acres of black bear habitat through the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) program administered by the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA). SAFE is a new nationwide continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) aimed at addressing state and regional wildlife objectives.

The funding proposal was spearheaded by The Nature Conservancy of Mississippi and the Bear Education and Restoration Group of Mississippi in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the MDWFP, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

While almost eliminated from the state in the early

1900s, black bear populations have shown signs of growth throughout Mississippi in the past five years. This is primarily due to increasing populations in neighboring states which has led to the first documented births of bear cubs in Mississippi in roughly 40 years. Several black bears have been fitted with GPS collars throughout the state in an effort to learn more about bear habitat preferences and movements as the population continues to grow.

A majority of the enrolled acreage will be dedicated to restoring native bottomland hardwood forests and forested wetlands in areas of Mississippi identified as priority zones for black bear recovery. Practices will create favorable habitat by incorporating a mixture of hard- and soft-mast spe-

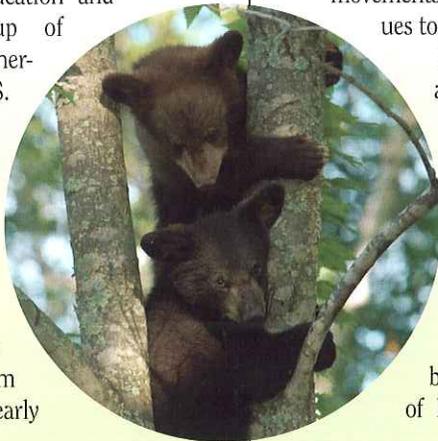


Photos: istockphoto

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cies to provide food sources, escape cover, elevated den sites, and travel corridors for dispersal.

Financial incentives available to landowners enrolling in SAFE include annual rental payments on enrolled acreage, a \$100 per acre sign-up incentive payment, 50% cost share, plus additional practice incentives. Landowners are required to sign a 10–15 year contract for all lands enrolled in the program. For more information on SAFE, visit your local USDA-NRCS office or contact Brad Young at [brad.young@mdwfp.state.ms.us](mailto:brad.young@mdwfp.state.ms.us) or 601.432.2242. **WI**



## Wildlife Issues

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