



# BEAR PROTECTION

ANIMAL WELFARE INSTITUTE

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## GLOBAL SPECIES

Eight species of bears are spread across the globe: North American black bears inhabit the woods of North America; Asiatic black bears, adorned with a cream-colored crescent shape on their chests, live in forested hills in Asia; brown bears roam across North America, Europe, and Asia; giant pandas cling to life in the dwindling bamboo forests of China; polar bears glide across the Arctic ices in Greenland, Norway, Alaska, Canada, and the former Soviet Union; sloth bears lurk in the grasslands and forests of the Indian Subcontinent; spectacled bears thrive in the mountainous regions of South America; and sun bears survive in the tropical forests of Southeast Asia. Each of these bears has a different population status—from the highly endangered panda with a mere 1,000 wild animals left, to the comparatively stable North American black bear whose numbers likely reach more than half a million.

## GLOBAL THREATS

One thing all bears have in common is that they are under assault by us. Humans are rapidly destroying the forests that many bear species need to survive; polar bear habitat is being ruined by toxic contaminants and oil spills. In some countries such as Pakistan, bears are cruelly taught to dance for tourists; they also have their claws and teeth removed before



Dan Curavich/[www.polarbearsalive.org](http://www.polarbearsalive.org)

*Although polar bears are protected under the US Marine Mammal Protection Act and by a 1976 international conservation agreement, global warming is altering their habitat, and they are still hunted for trophies.*

being chained and forced to fight against numerous mauling dogs. Bears are hunted for sport and illegally killed for their parts and the products made from them.

For centuries, bear gallbladders and bile have been prescribed as an ingredient in traditional medicine in Asia to treat a variety of human ailments. There is increasing evidence that these bear parts are not only being used in medicines, but also in items such as shampoos, hair tonics, and hemorrhoid creams. Populations of Asiatic black bears have been decimated as a result of the demand for bear parts and the destruction of bear habitat over time. Now, thousands of bears are confined in Chinese bear “farms” to be exploited for their bile. They live in cages so small they cannot turn around, a catheter is inserted into their gallbladders, and they are literally “milked” for their bile. Surgery is rarely performed with anesthetics or antiseptic precaution. Bears in these cages may be scarred from banging their heads on the bars and have gaping wounds from the insertion of the catheter. When the bears become too old to produce bile effectively, they are usually killed, their gallbladders are removed, and their paws are lopped off. Bear paw soup is an Asian culinary delicacy for which restaurant patrons pay significant sums.

As the Asian bear population dives toward extinction, increasing pressure is put on North America’s relatively stable population of black bears to supply the global trade in bear parts. Across America, bear carcasses have been found with the gallbladders ripped out, the paws cut off, and the slaughtered bear left to rot unceremoniously. An underground, illegal black market trade exists where bears are poached in one state and the gallbladders and paws (and sometimes claws and teeth) are either sold nearby, smuggled to



*Brown bear with pronounced scarring from banging his head against the cage bars. This is one of the many painful injuries that bears sustain as a result of this solitary confinement in grotesquely restrictive cages.*

another state and sold fraudulently as parts of a legally killed bear, or covertly exported out of the country for sale internationally. According to one state enforcement official, “The drain on wildlife resources because of all the various markets and demands for either wildlife or parts is tremendous.” The bear parts trade forms a complex global web: American bear parts are consumed domestically and exported overseas; European, Asian, and other bears are killed in the wild and sold internationally; and farmed bile from Chinese bear farms is smuggled out of China to the United States and elsewhere for illegal sale.

### GLOBAL ACTION NEEDED

Bears must be protected from this disastrous global trade. All bear species are protected under the United Nations Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Most of them are on Appendix I, which means that no commercial trade is allowed. Others are on Appendix II, which means that one can trade in their parts and products with necessary permits. The greatest problem with this kind of divided regulation, however, is that once a gallbladder is removed from a bear, it is visually impossible to distinguish the gallbladder of an endangered bear from the gallbladder of a more plentiful bear species. It may be impossible, even with sophisticated DNA analysis, to tell from what species of bear a small vial of processed bile originated. This creates huge loopholes that bear poachers and bear parts smugglers can exploit to their financial advantage.



Animals Asia Foundation

*This Asiatic black bear was rescued from a Chinese bear farm by the Animals Asia Foundation (AAF) and is being rehabilitated in its sanctuary. AAF's goal is to save at least 500 bears.*

In 1997, Parties to CITES unanimously adopted a Resolution on the *Conservation of and Trade in Bears*. Among its many laudable provisions, the Resolution calls on all Parties to confirm, adopt, or improve “their national legislation to control the import and export of bear parts and derivatives.” Unfortunately, in the United States there is no national legislation to protect American black bears from this trade. Such regulation is done at the state level. While most states wisely prohibit the trade in bear parts, a small minority of states still allows this unfettered commerce to continue. This means that bears can be illegally killed in a state such as California and their gallbladders smuggled to a state such as Idaho where they can then be sold deceitfully. One state wildlife law enforcement officer said of this legal disparity: “It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that states where trade is legal will draw traders from states where the trade is banned.”

But legislators in the United States Congress want to create a sound national policy against the trade in bear gallbladders and bile. During each session of Congress, the *Bear Protection Act* is introduced. This legislation would prohibit the import, export, and domestic sale of bear viscera, or even products that contain or are labeled as containing bear viscera. As Kentucky Senator Mitch McConnell, who authored the *Bear Protection Act* in the Senate, noted: “There is a bounty on the head of every American black bear, and the main reason behind the lucrative trade is greed.” He urged his Senate colleagues to help him send a strong message that “America will not stand by while insidious dealers profit from the wanton destruction of our wild animals.”



John White

*The South American cloud forests may be home to only a couple thousand rare spectacled bears, so named because they seem to be wearing furry eyeglasses. Their forests are being felled to make room for agricultural plantations.*

## YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Bears must be protected from the trade in their parts and other cruelty. Don't buy any products containing any parts of a bear! Even the smallest purchase will help fuel this global trade.

Let your state fish and game agency know that you support a prohibition on the trade in bear parts and the strongest possible protection for bears in your state, across America, and indeed, across the globe. You can contact AWI and we'll help get you the address for your state game agency. Urge your elected officials to ensure that the United States does not contribute to the global decline of any bear species.

Also, send a letter to the United States Department of the Interior applauding the US's historic leadership on bear conservation issues under CITES and expressing your hope that we will continue to be a leader in this regard. Write to: The Secretary of the Interior, US Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240.

If you read of any stories in your hometown newspapers about bear poaching or arrests made for the illegal trade in bear parts, please let AWI know. If you pass these stories on to us, we can pass them along to people in Washington who can help put an end to the bloody bear parts trade.

## ABOUT US

The *Animal Welfare Institute* is a non-profit charitable organization founded in 1951 to reduce the sum total of pain and fear inflicted on animals by humans. We work to reform the cruel treatment of bears and to put an end to the deleterious global trade in bear parts.



Cathy Liss/AWI

*Grizzly bears inspire awe and fear in most people. Corporate logging, development, and resource exploration are destroying the grizzly's remaining habitat.*



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