Man in ‘critical’ condition after bear attack in Franklin County

by: Reagan Wynn Date: September 5, 2025
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An elderly Arkansas man is in the hospital after a black bear attacked him in Franklin County on Wednesday. Wildlife officials say it’s the first bear attack they’ve seen in the state in at least 25 years.

The man, who is 72 years old, was reportedly working on a tractor on the side of a gravel road in the Mulberry Mountain area when the incident occurred. His son showed up to check on him and saw a bear about the size of a large dog attacking him. Arkansas Game and Fish Commission communications chief Keith Stephens told reporters the son was able to pull the bear off and get his father to safety.

“It wasn’t a very large bear,” Stephens told *40/29 News*. “It weighed about 80 pounds. Probably a yearling. They are about that size when they are pushed out of the den by the mother.”

The victim was reportedly airlifted to a hospital in Fayetteville with severe injuries. He is now in CRITICAL condition, according to *5 News*.

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Stephens said AGFC game wardens killed the bear. The carcass was transported to a lab in Russellville for a necropsy, and its brain was sent to the state health department for rabies testing. Results are expected within a few days. As part of the necropsy, the bear's stomach contents will be examined. It could reveal whether the bear had become habituated to human food and other attractants that resulted in it losing its fear of people.

Agency officials said unprovoked black bear attacks are highly unusual. There also hasn't been a confirmed attack, provoked or unprovoked, in Arkansas for more than two decades.

"I've been at the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission for almost 20 years and have never heard of a black bear attack on a human," said Trey Reid, AGFC assistant chief of communications. "An unprovoked attack, it's just unheard of honestly."

Arkansas' black bear population has grown in recent decades. Pre-settlement estimates put the statewide black bear population at 50,000, but the species was hunted to near-extinction by the 1930s in what was once known as the Bear State. In 1927, black bear hunting was deemed illegal because the population was so low.

To remedy this loss, the Black Bear Restoration Program, operating from 1958 to 1968, transported a few hundred bears from Minnesota and Manitoba to the Ozarks. The move helped bolster the existing population, and the state's bear population rebounded from around 50 animals to more than 5,000 today.

"The return of black bears to Arkansas is considered one of the most successful wildlife reintroduction stories in the history of North American wildlife management," Reid said. "We track a number of them with radio collars and track their reproductive rates and obviously have a very robust bear season in Arkansas."

Arkansas hunters harvested 765 black bears in 2023, a new state record. Eighty percent of those bears were taken by archers. The 2025 hunting season opens with archery September 17, followed by muzzleloader in October and rifle season in November.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Causes and Effects

Remember: an effect (what happened) and a cause (why it happened)

- Look at each row in the chart. Each row has a **Cause** and an **Effect** about the bear incident.
- Choose the missing cause or effect to complete the chart.

People are told to keep trash closed tightly.

The population of the bears grew from 50 to 5000.

An old man is in the hospital.

The bear was killed by wildlife officers.

They need to know why the bear attacked.

A necropsy and rabies test was done on the bear

People are taught about bears and safety.

They wanted to see what the bear had eaten.

A large number of bears were killed by hunters.

Bears usually didn't attack people.

	CAUSES	EFFECTS
1.	A man was attacked by a bear.	
2.		The attack is described as the first unprovoked bear attack in Arkansas in many years.
3.	They wanted to know if illness or rabies made the bear act that way.	
4.		The bear's stomach was checked.
5.	Bears that eat people's food come back and cause more encounters.	
6.		They talk about unprovoked versus provoked attacks.
7.	To make sure the bear never attacks people again.	
8.		The bear's population was almost extinct in the 1930s.
9.	Many bears were moved from Minnesota and Manitoba to Ozarks.	
10.		The incidences of bears attacking people will be less in the future.

LIVEWORKSHEETS