

## Protect Our Bears from the Bear Bile Trade

The Bear Poaching Elimination Act would end the poaching of bears for their gallbladders as part of the effort to crack down on wildlife trafficking. It bans trading in gall bladders and bile, which is sought in part to make traditional Chinese medicine. In 2020, the Chinese Ministry of Health announced that bear bile was an acceptable palliative treatment for COVID-19. The Bear Poaching Elimination Act does not affect lawful hunting.

### *Why are Bears Killed for their Gallbladders?*

Across the world, bears and cubs are killed by poachers who take only their gallbladders, and sometimes their paws, leaving the rest of the bear behind. The gallbladders are easy to conceal and fetch a high price (\$1,000 or more per gallbladder) due to their use in traditional Asian medicine, including as a bogus COVID-19 remedy touted by the Chinese government. Captured bears are kept in pits or cages and “milked” for their bile in what amounts to a horror show.

Bears are sometimes subjected to the “free drip” method, which sees the bears surgically mutilated via a fistula (or hole) that has been cut into the abdomen and gall bladder. Wild bears in Asia have been depleted, and there is evidence that American bears are being targeted due to the demand for bear bile.

### *Poaching Bears for their Gallbladders is Wasteful and Cruel*

Some poachers take only the gallbladder, leaving behind the rest of the bear to rot. These are not legitimate hunters, and the methods they use to kill bears are horrific: According to a police officer who videotaped poaching activity involving a bear cub repeatedly stabbed after its mother’s gallbladder had been removed. “The cruelty was beyond any of our expectations. We expected quick clean kills, but they relished in the killing.”

### *Wildlife Traffickers are Threatening Bear Populations*

Killing bears for their gallbladders has been linked to large, organized criminal activity, and due to the growing and unsustainable trade in bear gallbladders, bear populations are at risk globally. Poachers began



targeting bears in the U.S. in the late 1980s, when hunters and park rangers in the U.S. began finding dead bears missing only gallbladders, leading to investigations that have uncovered evidence of large commercial organizations dealing in poaching and smuggling bear parts.

While bear farms are closing in Vietnam and South Korea in the coming years, China still operates large numbers of “bear farms” but those operations are in decline as well. As these bears farms close, there will be more pressure on wild populations, and the United States has some of the largest populations of bears, making them vulnerable. In short, as we step up efforts to crack down on the abuse of captive bears, we must also shield wild bears from increased pressure.

### *The Current Patchwork of Laws is Insufficient*

While forty states have laws to address this trade, these vary widely state-to-state. A trafficker in **Colorado** may face up to three years in prison and a \$100,000 fine, while a trafficker in **Kentucky** may receive only a \$100 fine. Federal sentencing guidelines dictate that the market value of the item must be at least \$350 for a prosecution under the federal Lacey Act, but the courts assign a value of a gallbladder to \$280. Ultimately, the trade must be prohibited entirely to stop poaching of American bear gallbladders and stop contributing to this cruelty globally.