Assessing and Increasing Community Bear Knowledge

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Project Motivation & Goals

In recent years, black bear (*Ursus americanus*) populations have been increasing within the northeast U.S. states along with human-bear interactions and conflicts. (Fig 1). Connecticut (CT) is among the states with this rise, primarily within the western side of the state, especially in my town of Burlington (Fig 1).

In order to ensure the safety of bears and humans in my community I wanted to increase bear awareness in my community.

My project goals were:

Goal 1: Survey my community on their bear awareness.

Goal 2: Analyze the survey data to determine my community's level of bear awareness.

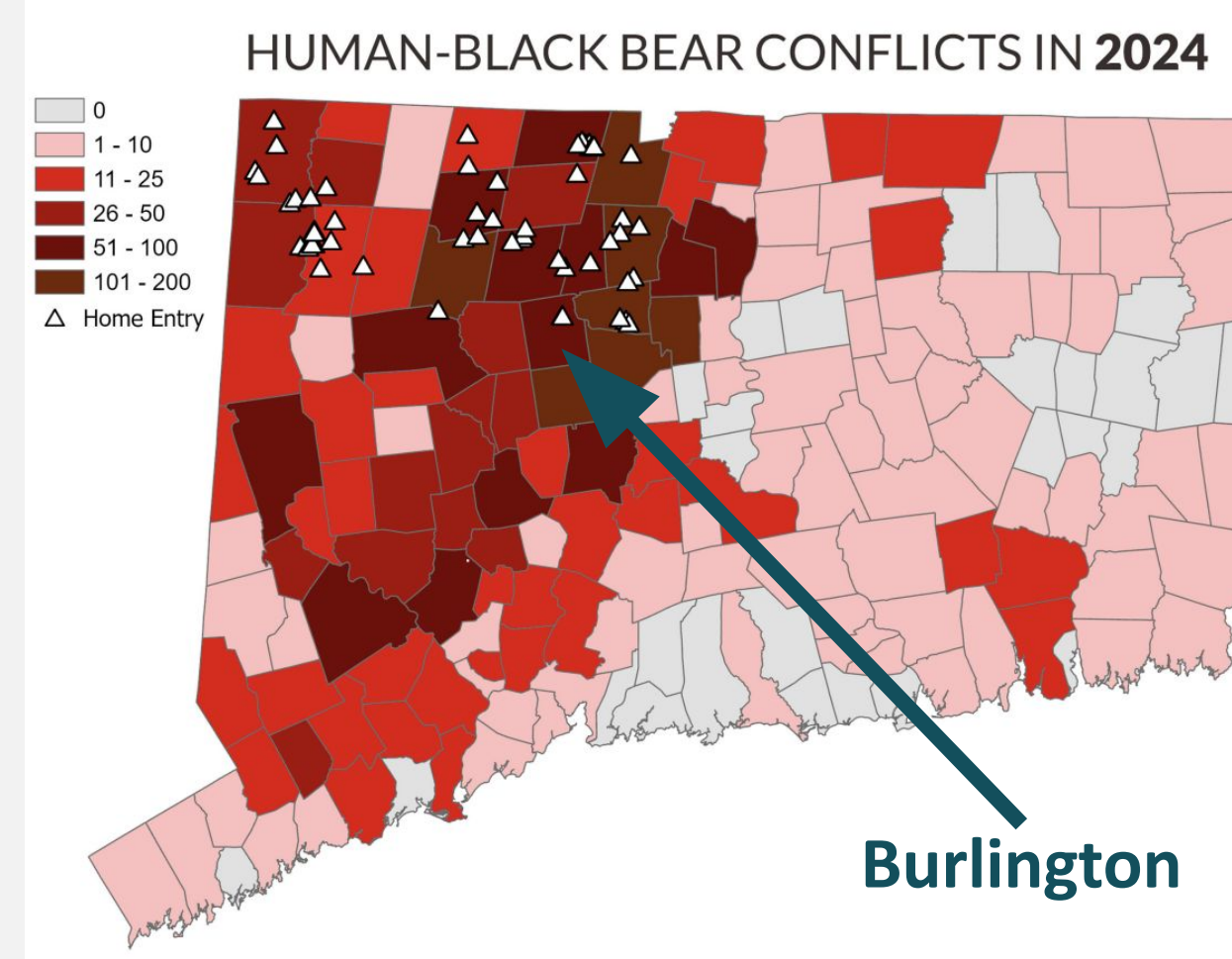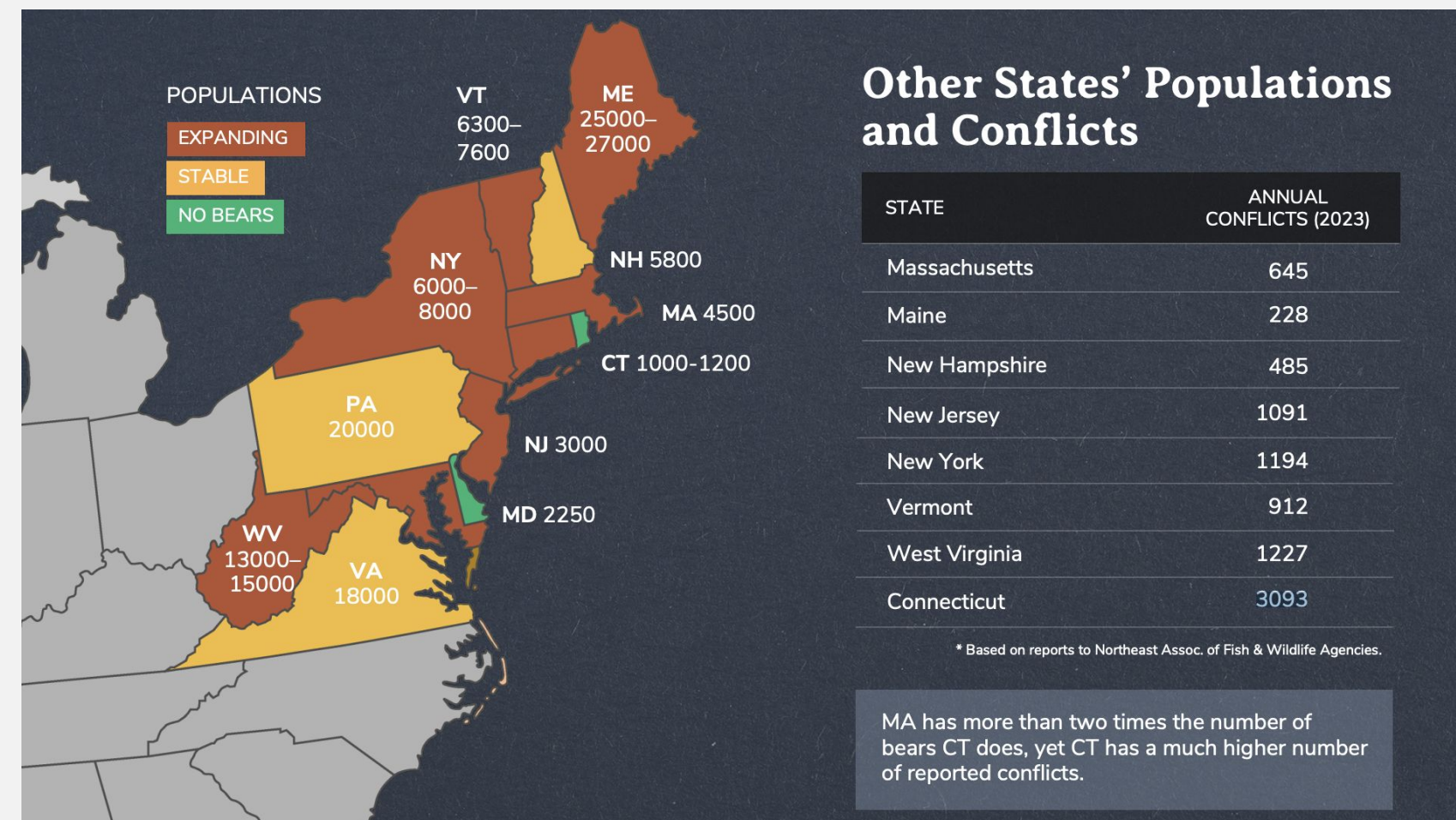**Goal 3:** Develop an educational program to educate my community on gaps in community bear knowledge.

Fig 1. Maps showing human-bear conflicts within Northeast U.S. states[1] (Top) and within CT[1] (Bottom).

Project Outcomes

Community Bear Awareness Survey Results

- I collected a total of **114 survey responses** from the local community *(48.7% Burlington; 23.0% Simsbury; 28.3% Avon, Farmington, Harwinton, Canton, & Bristol)*.

- **Nearly half of participants** (44%) felt **somewhat to little to no confidence in their knowledge** on how to **live safely with bears** (Fig 2, top left).

- The **majority of participants** (70.8%) reported **seeing between 1-10 bears** in the past year *(only 2 participants reported not seeing a bear in the last year)* (Fig 2, top right).

- However, **82.8% of participants** said that they **never report bear sightings** to CT Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) (Fig 2, bottom left).
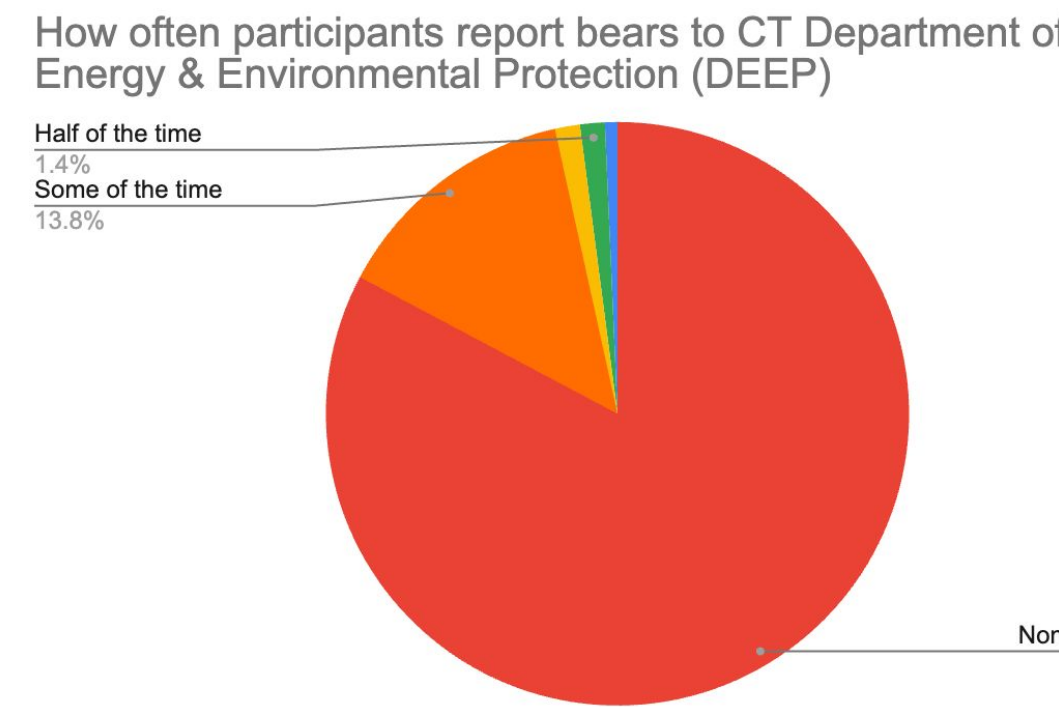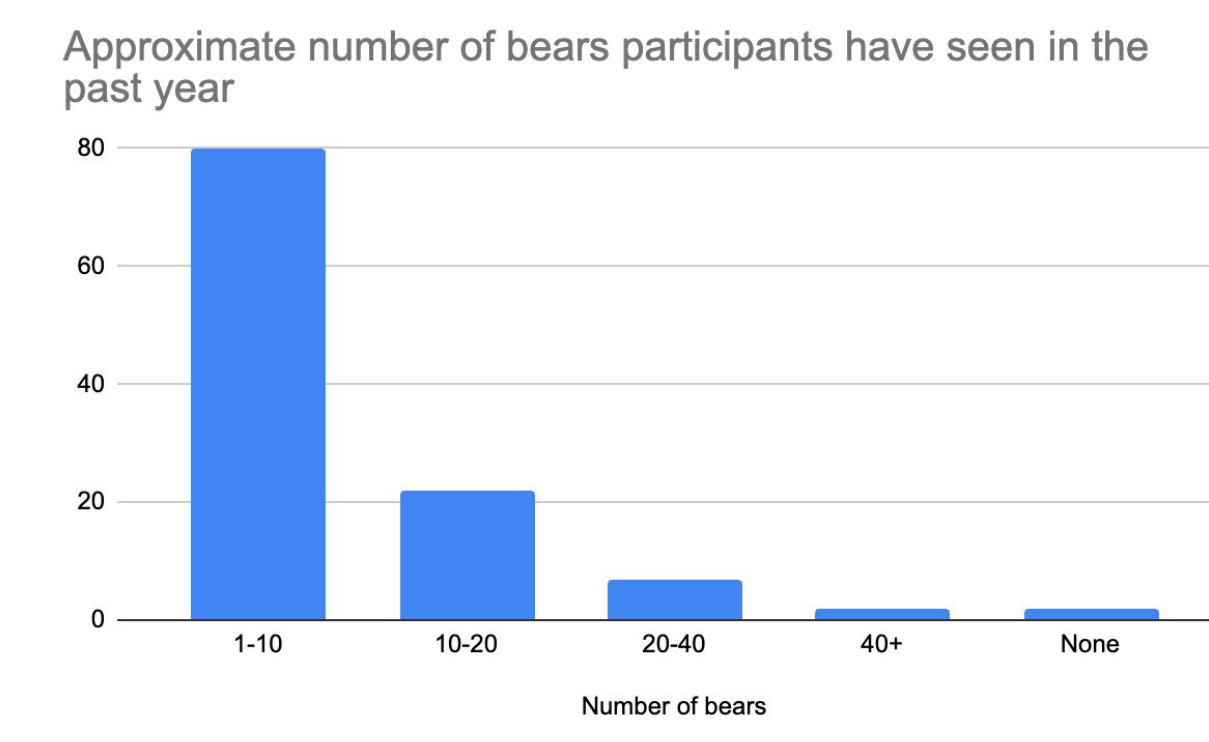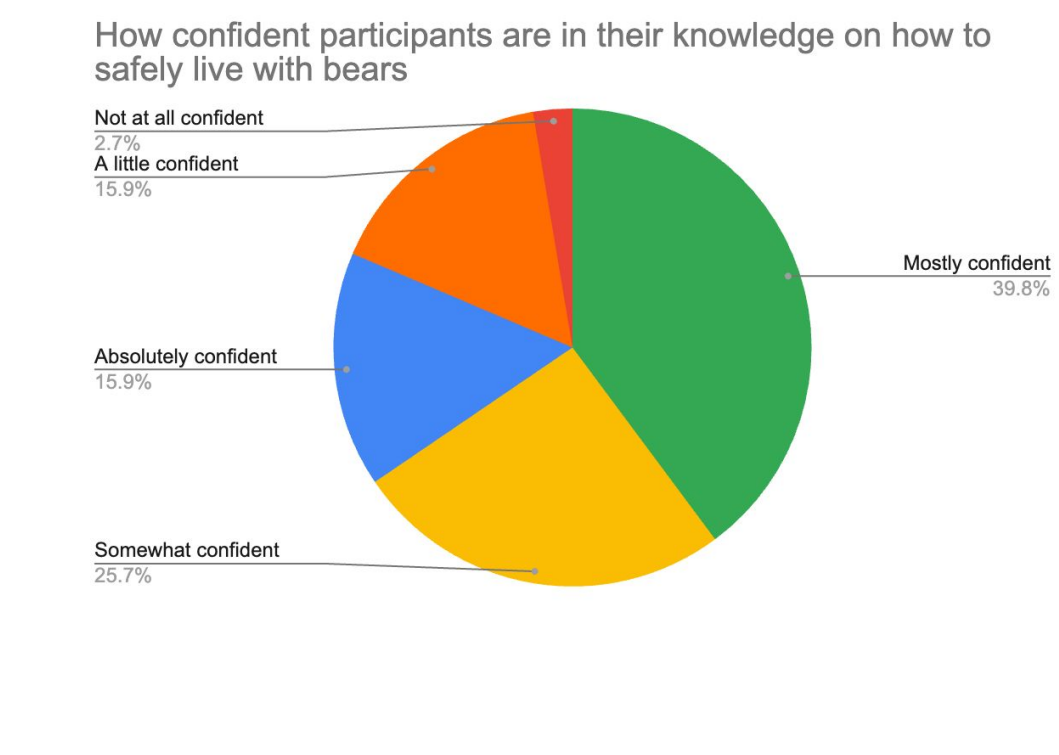

Fig 2. (Top Left) Chart of participants confidence on how to safely live with bears. (Top Right) Chart of approximate number of bears participants have seen in the past year. (Bottom Left) Chart of how often participants report bears to CT DEEP.

Community Program on How to Safely Live with Bears

- In my program, I presented my **survey results** as well as **information on how to live with bears** from the CT DEEP[2] and BearWise[3] websites (Fig 3).

- Approximately **20 people attended** the program and asked questions about bear proof trash cans, birdfeeders, and keeping pets safe from bears.

Fig 3. Select slides from community program on How to Safely Live with Bears. Scan QR for slides.
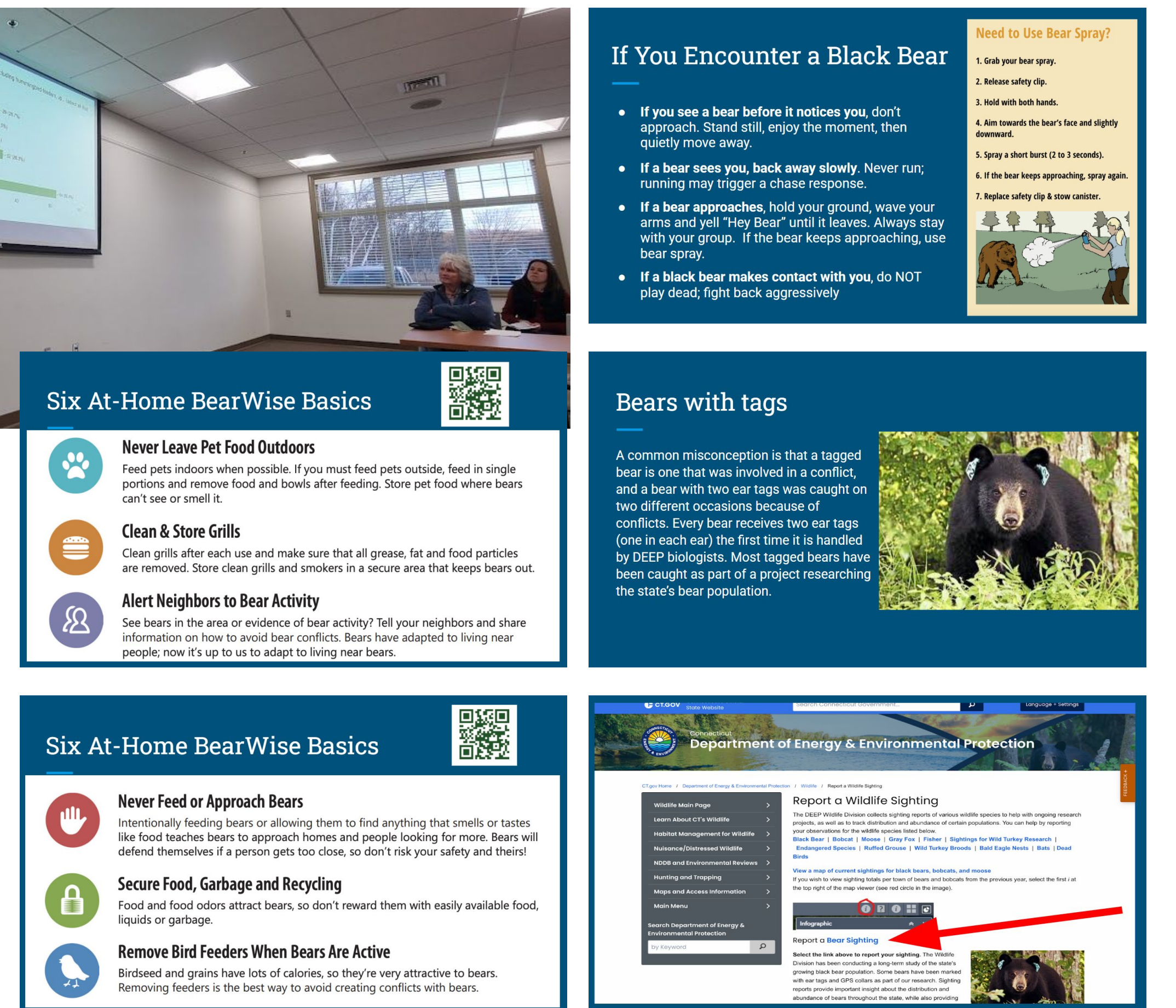
Methods

Surveying My Community

- I created a community survey with multiple choice questions that covered:
  - How often participants interacted with bears
  - How participants felt about these interactions
  - Participants' knowledge on bear safety
- I spread the Google Form survey throughout my community by sharing it with my school, public library, and on social media.
- I gathered responses for 2 months in December 2024 and January 2025.

Help Us Learn About Bear Awareness!

Take the survey above to help us learn about bear awareness in our community

I'm a high school student and this is a part of my community action project within UCONN's Natural Resources Conservation Academy (nrca.uconn.edu)

Creating a Community Presentation

- Utilizing the information I gained in my survey, I developed a community presentation to address the gaps in bear aware knowledge for members of my community.
- I held my presentation at the Burlington Public Library on 3/26/25.

How to Live with Bears

Annie Durkin
NRCA Student
Burlington Public Library
3/26/25
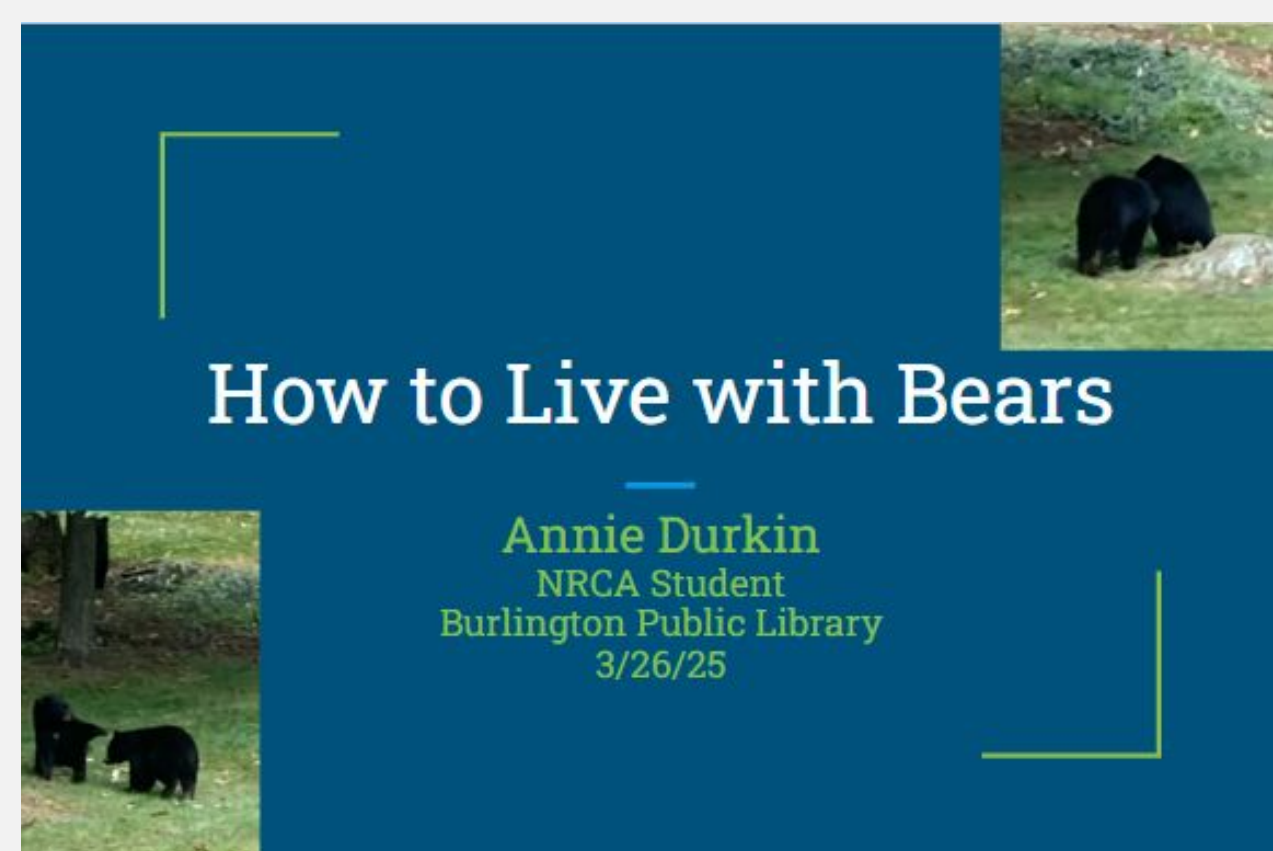
(Top) The flyer promoting the survey. (Bottom) The title slide from my community presentation.

Community Partnership

To develop a meaningful Connecticut black bear awareness survey and educational curriculum, I partnered and consulted with wildlife biologists and researchers:

- **Sydney Greenfield** (UConn Natural Resources PhD Student) studying changes in black bear foraging and behavior in CT over time.
- **Jenna Lopardo** from the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Wildlife Division.

To provide an accessible educational workshop to community members in a community with high human-bear interactions, I also partnered with the **Burlington Public Library,** who provided/helped:

- Space to host my community bear awareness presentation, and
- Spread the word about my event

(Left to Right). Sydney Greenfield performing field research. A black bear at the doorstep of Annie Durkin's house in Burlington, CT. The Burlington Public Library.

Conclusion and Next Steps

- The number of bears in CT is increasing and this means more people are having interactions with bears.
- The majority of people don't report bear sightings, so CT DEEP numbers are an underestimation.
- From my survey, I learned that most people have some basic knowledge about bears, but often don't realize how trash cans and bird feeders can lead to bear conflict.
- CT DEEP and BearWise have amazing resources on how to live with bears, and they can be better used to educate the public if more people were aware that these resources are there.

QR code to the BearWise website.

Acknowledgements and References

1. Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. (2024). The State of the Bears - A Briefing on Bears in Connecticut. https://portal.ct.gov/deep/wildlife/fact-sheets/black-bear
2. Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. https://portal.ct.gov/deep (Accessed March 24, 2025.)
3. Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. (Accessed March 24, 2025.) Bearwise: helping people live responsibly with bears. Retrieved from bearwise.org.