

THE MANITOBA SPRING BLACK BEAR HUNT

ZOOCHECK



MALATEST

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Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Highlighted below are the key findings associated with the public opinion survey commissioned by Zoocheck and undertaken by R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. in late 2025-early 2026. The research was conducted using a verified research panel as well as limited telephone interviews to ensure that all regions and demographic groups were included in the study. In total, the survey results are based on the responses provided by 393 Manitobans who participated in the survey. Based on this level of participation, the maximum variation for the survey responses was estimated to be within +/- 4.9% (at the 95% confidence level).

There is limited awareness of the Spring Bear Hunt among individuals surveyed. Overall, fewer than one half (41%) of individuals surveyed were aware that Manitoba had a spring bear hunt. Very few (4%) of respondents noted that they were very familiar with the spring bear hunt. Men were more likely than women to be aware of the hunt (49% vs 34%); but among either group, fewer than one half of respondents indicated an awareness of the hunt.

There was a high level of support in terms of implementing changes to the Spring Bear hunt. The results of the survey suggest that the majority of Manitobans want to see changes to the spring bear hunt. For example, almost two-thirds (60%) of respondents noted that the use of bear baiting was not a fair way to conduct the spring bear hunt. Similarly, nine in ten (90%) of respondents were either very supportive (69%) or somewhat supportive (21%) of the need to have mandatory reporting of the number and/or sex of bears harvested as part of the spring bear hunt.

Almost all respondents surveyed want to see some reductions in the number of bears harvested as part of the Manitoba Spring Bear hunt.

Nine in ten (90%) of Manitobans wanted to see changes to the spring bear hunt. For example, two-thirds (65%) of respondents were very supportive of the abolition of the spring bear hunt. In addition, a further 25% noted that they were somewhat supportive of the elimination of the spring bear hunt. Only 5% of respondents surveyed noted that they were not supportive of restrictions on the spring bear hunt.

Most respondents see opportunities to replace the Spring Bear hunting with eco-tourism activities. Among those surveyed, approximately 4 in 5 were supportive of the concept of retraining outfitters to focus on eco-tourism opportunities to offset possible losses due to hunting restrictions. 42% of respondents were very supportive of such re-training, while 39% of respondents noted that they were somewhat supportive of such re-training. Only 10% of respondents were opposed to such retraining.

While there were differences on the basis of gender, region and Indigenous affiliation, the majority of all respondents were supportive of restrictions on the current Spring Bear hunt.

The results of the survey indicate that women were more likely than men to support the elimination of the spring bear hunt (72% of women were very supportive of the elimination of the spring bear hunt versus 60% of men who held the same opinion). Similarly, support for the elimination of the spring bear hunt was also higher among those respondents who resided in the Greater Winnipeg region as compared to elsewhere in the Province (69% versus 56%). Interestingly, it appears that Indigenous respondents were more supportive of the elimination of the spring bear hunt than were non-Indigenous respondents (76% versus 64%) although caution should be exercised give the relatively limited number of Indigenous respondents in the sample (33).

1. Research Methodology

Highlighted below is a discussion of the survey approach used for this survey as well as a discussion of study limitations.

1.1 Survey Background

Zoocheck, a Canadian-based international wildlife protection charity, was established in 1984 to promote and protect the interests and well-being of wild animals. Zoocheck works to improve wildlife through various means, including investigation, research, public education and awareness campaigns.

Zoocheck commissioned R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (Malatest) to survey public opinion on the Manitoba spring hunt of black bears. This was a voluntary survey that aimed to gather awareness and attitudes of the spring bear hunt among residents of the province. Malatest worked with Zoocheck to develop a survey that was designed to measure the following issues:

- The level of awareness among Manitobans as to the spring bear hunt that occurs in Manitoba.
- Support for restrictions on how the spring bear hunt is conducted, including the use of “bear baiting” to attract bears to designated locations and the inclusion of mandatory reporting of the number and sex of bears harvested.
- The level of support for the elimination of the spring bear hunt in Manitoba.
- Support for the implementation of retraining programs to assist affected individuals (outfitters, others) to transition to eco-tourism activities to offset the possible loss of income should the spring bear hunt be discontinued.

The study relied on both a random telephone survey (conducted by Malatest) and the use of an online survey panel maintained by a national research firm (Leger360) to ensure that the information obtained represented a valid sample of Manitoba residents.

1.2 Methods

The mixed-mode survey was conducted between July 2025 and January 2026. The majority of surveys completed was gathered through a panel of respondents. In total, 393 responses were collected. In order to test the survey, a telephone survey was administered to a random sample of Manitoba residents from all regions of the province. In total, 45 surveys were completed by telephone and the results of the telephone survey confirmed that the survey questions were understood by respondents and that most could easily answer the questions in the survey.

Following the administration of the telephone “pre-test”, the full survey was launched using an online panel. The panel (Leger360) included respondents from across Manitoba and consists of individuals who consent to participate in research studies.¹ Use of such panels for opinion research is common for such studies. Overall, 348 individuals completed the online survey.

¹ The panel was supplied by Leger360; see <https://leger360.com/>.

The resulting sample was close to the population parameters by gender and region. The tables below (Figures 1 and 2) breakdown completed surveys by gender and by region.

Figure 1: Summary of surveys completed by gender

Gender	Completed	%
Men	199	51%
Women	189	48%
Other responses	5	1%
Total	393	100%

While the survey sample had slightly more respondents from the Greater Winnipeg area than other areas of the province, the distribution was not overly skewed to any region and/or demographic subgroup. This alignment meant that data weighting was not required for the purposes of accounting for under-represented groups. Based on random sampling methods, it is estimated that the maximum variance for the survey would be within +/-4.9% (19 times out of 20).

Figure 2: Summary of surveys completed by geography

Region	Completed	%	Population % estimates*
Interlake	18	5%	7%
North	11	3%	4%
North Central	13	3%	5%
Parklands	12	3%	3%
South Central	15	4%	5%
Southeast	23	6%	9%
Southwest	27	7%	9%
Winnipeg	274	70%	58%
Total	393	100%	100%

* Statistics Canada (2023). Table: 98-10-0132-01 www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810013201

All survey data were processed, cleaned and analyzed using SPSS.² The analysis included descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages to summarize respondent demographics and key variables. Where applicable, cross-tabulations were performed to compare results between demographic characteristics and survey responses.

This study reveals modest but consistent differences in perspectives among men and women, and between people living in Winnipeg and the rest of Manitobans. These differences are profiled throughout this report. The report also presents results for Indigenous respondents, compared to non-Indigenous respondents, recognizing their experience and perspective.³

² See www.ibm.com/products/spss

³ Results must be read with caution, considering the small sample size of Indigenous respondents (33 respondents). Indigenous respondents came from different parts of Manitoba, with about two-thirds living in Winnipeg and one-third outside Winnipeg, a similar proportion to the population of the province. This suggests that differences in perspectives do not represent their location alone.

2. Findings

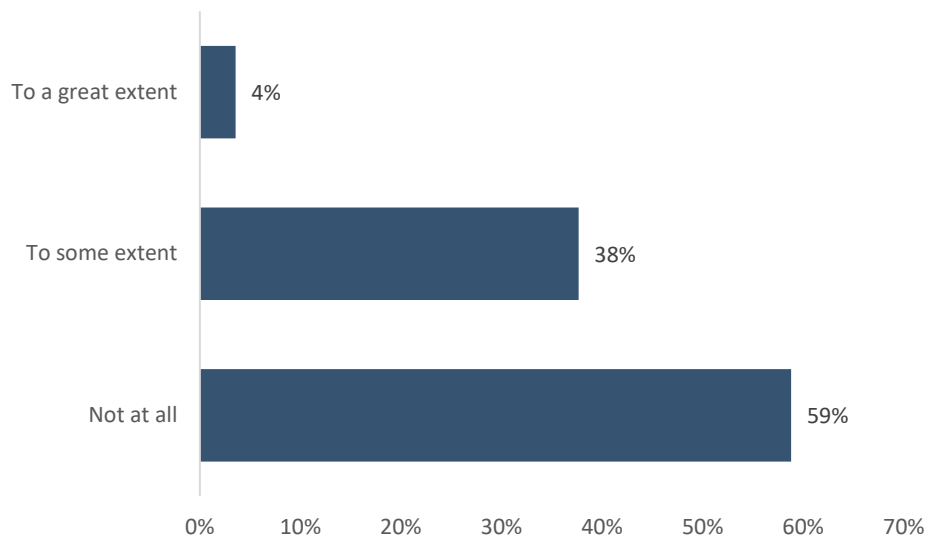
Highlighted below are the key findings associated with the public opinion survey regarding the Manitoba spring bear hunt. Results are presented under the following headings:

- 2.1 Awareness of the Spring Bear hunt
- 2.2 Attitudes Regarding Current Practices
- 2.3 Support for the Ending of the Spring Black Bear hunt
- 2.4 Support for Mitigation Strategies to assist those Affected by the Possible Closure of the Spring Black Bear hunt

2.1 Awareness of the Spring Bear hunt

Most respondents reported that they were not familiar with the spring bear hunt in Manitoba (59%). More than one-third (38%) indicated that they were familiar to some extent, while another 4% were familiar to a great extent (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Level of awareness



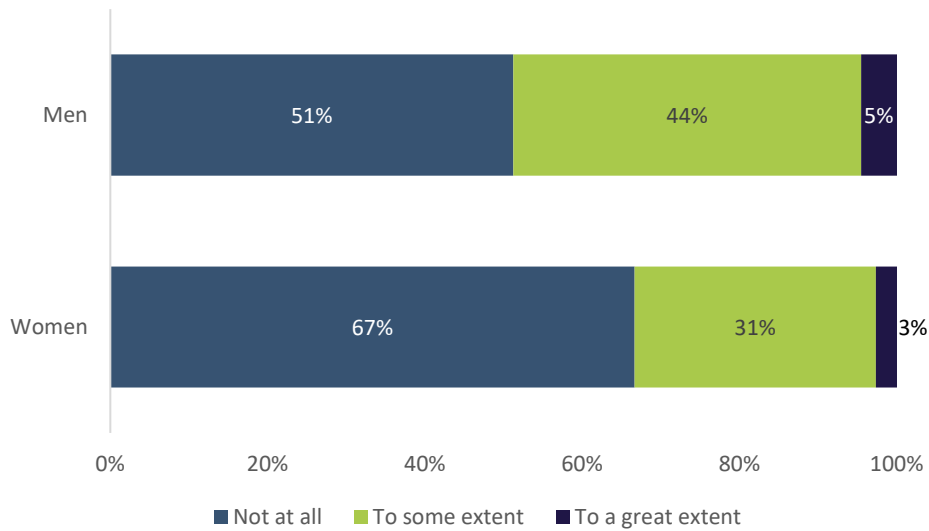
*Sample size: 393

Question 3: How familiar are you of the spring bear hunt in Manitoba?

The findings showed that awareness of the spring bear hunt varies by gender. Women reported less awareness than men overall, with 67% of women not at all aware of the hunt (versus 51% of men) (See Figure 4).



Figure 4: Awareness of the hunt by gender

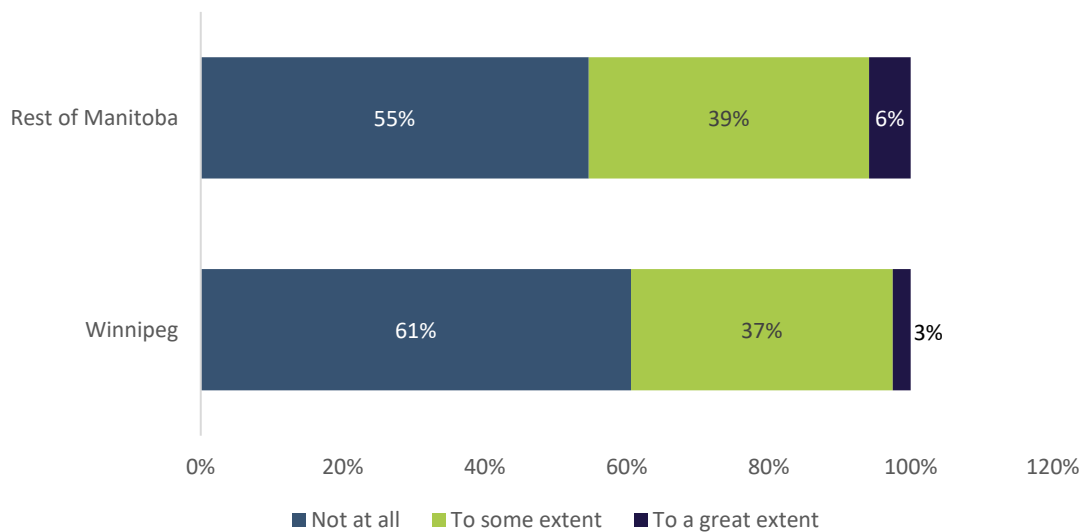


*Sample size: men: 199, women: 189

Question 3: How familiar are you of the spring bear hunt in Manitoba?

When it comes to region, findings show that awareness of the spring bear hunt was similar across groups, but slightly lower in Winnipeg than in the rest of Manitoba. In Winnipeg, a greater proportion of individuals reported being not at all familiar with the hunt (61%) compared to the rest of the province (55%) (See Figure 5).

Figure 5: Awareness of the hunt by region



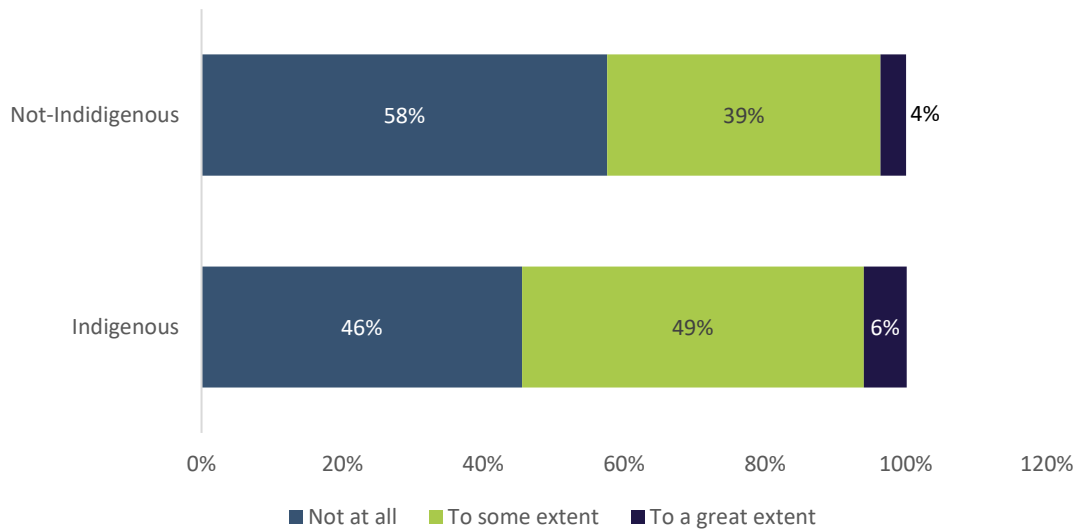
*Sample size: Winnipeg: 274, Rest of Manitoba: 119

Question 3: How familiar are you of the spring bear hunt in Manitoba?

The level of awareness was similar between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals, although Indigenous respondents are somewhat more aware (See Figure 6).



Figure 6: Awareness of the hunt by Indigenous identification



*Sample size: Indigenous: 33, Non-Indigenous: 309

Question 3: How familiar are you with the spring bear hunt in Manitoba?

2.2 Attitudes Regarding Current Practices

The survey included several questions that addressed current practices associated with the spring bear hunt currently in place in Manitoba. In particular, respondents were asked about practices with respect to the following:

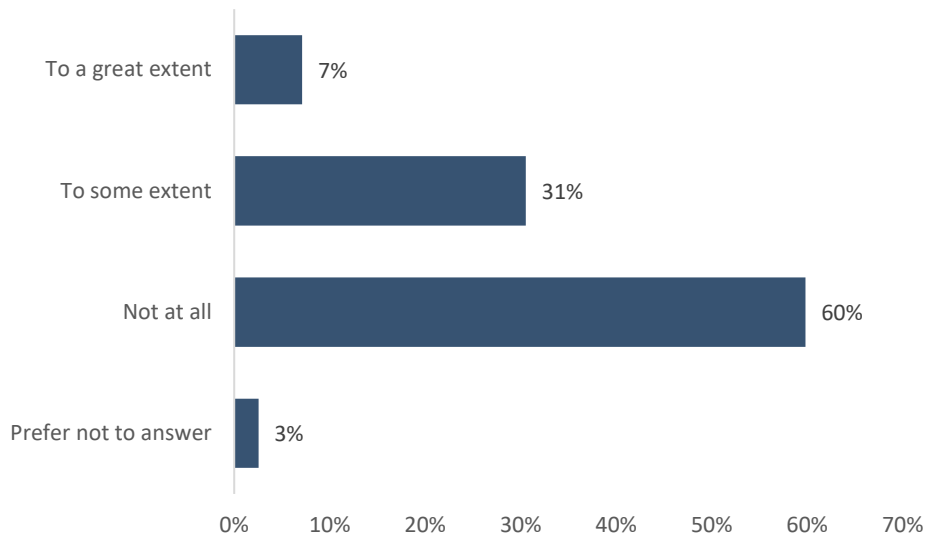
- The use of baiting for the purpose of attracting bears to specific locations.
- Elimination of bear baiting to reduce bear-human interactions.
- The reporting structure which does not include mandatory reporting.

Fairness of bear baiting

When asked whether they considered bear baiting a fair hunt, most respondents reported that they did not consider bear baiting a fair practice (60%). One-third of the respondents (31%) viewed it as fair to some extent. Only 7% considered it fair to a great extent (See Figure 7).



Figure 7: Fairness of bear baiting

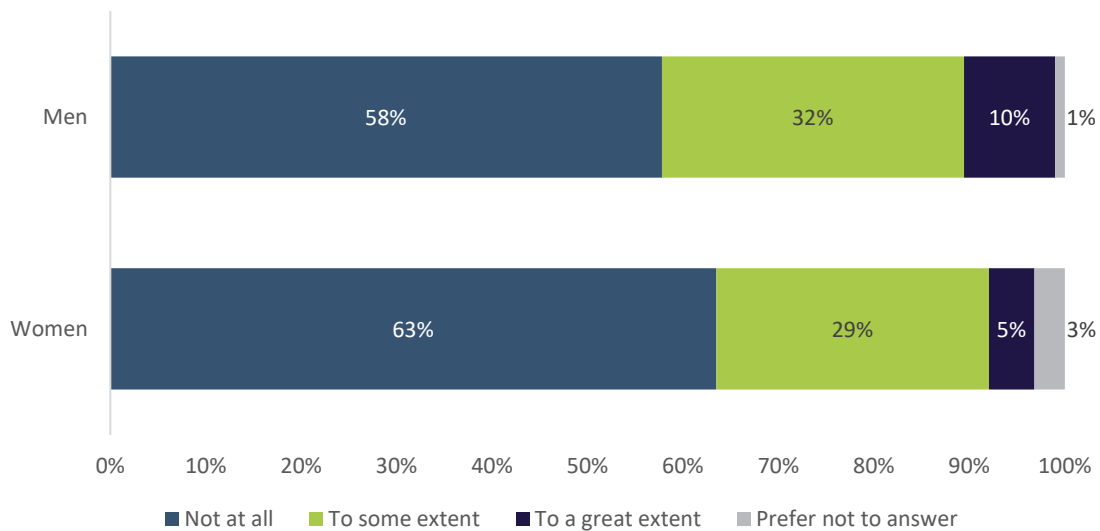


*Sample size: 393

Question 4: To what extent do you consider bear baiting a fair hunt?

Results indicated similar attitudes towards bear baiting based on gender. Both women and men viewed bear baiting as an unfair hunting practice, while only 10% of men and 5% of women hold the opposite view (See Figure 8).

Figure 8: Fairness of bear baiting by gender

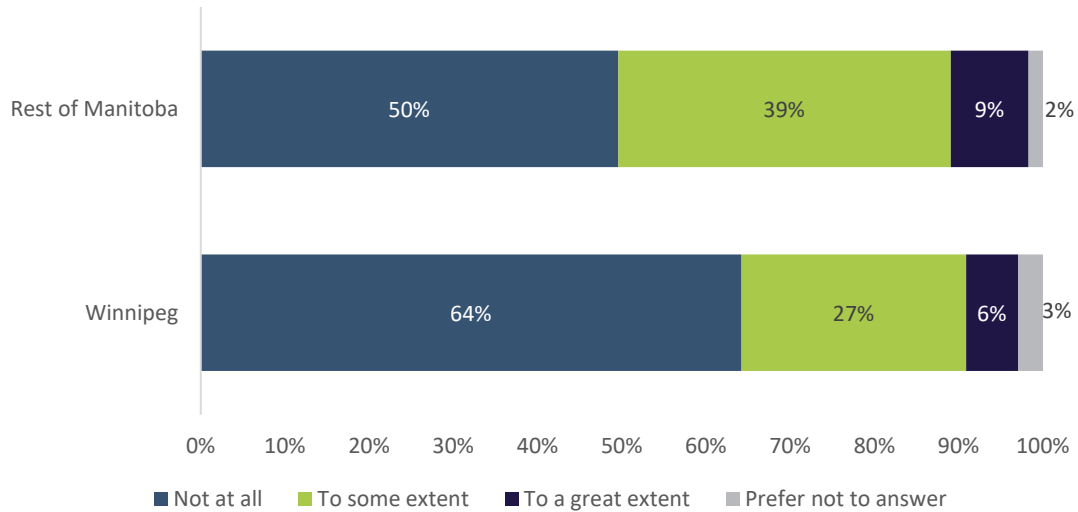


*Sample size: men: 199, women: 189

Question 4: To what extent do you consider bear baiting a fair hunt?

Regionally, most respondents in Winnipeg did not consider bear baiting a fair hunt (64%). Fewer respondents did not consider it fair in the rest of Manitoba (50%), while 39% considered bait hunting fair to some extent, and 9% considered it fair to a great extent (See Figure 9).

Figure 9: Fairness of bear baiting by region

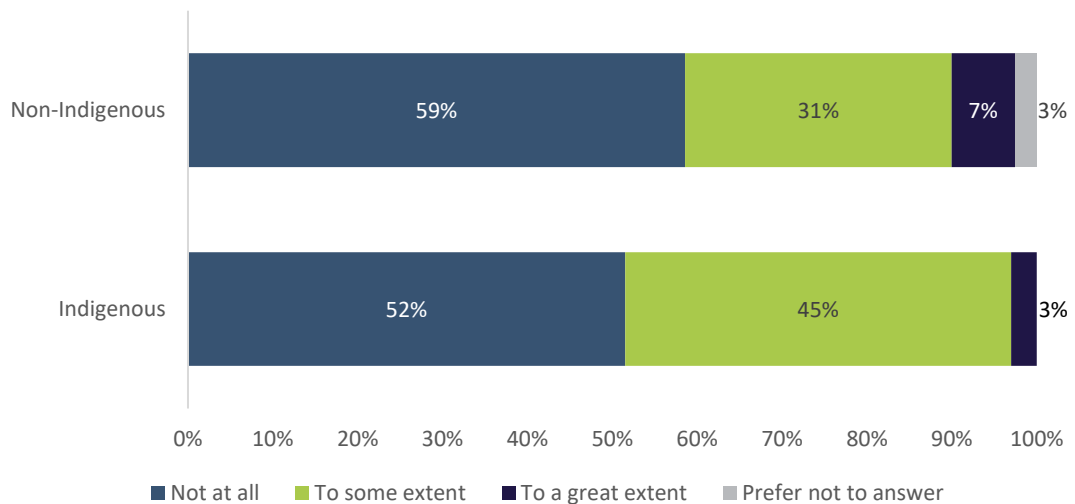


*Sample size: Winnipeg: 274, Rest of Manitoba: 119

Question 4: To what extent do you consider bear baiting a fair hunt?

Although both Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents largely considered bear baiting as unfair, Indigenous respondents showed a higher acceptance of bear baiting, with 45% rating it at least somewhat fair versus 31% of non-Indigenous respondents. In contrast, a larger share of non-Indigenous respondents (59%) considered it unfair, compared with 52% of Indigenous respondents (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Fairness of bear baiting by Indigenous identification



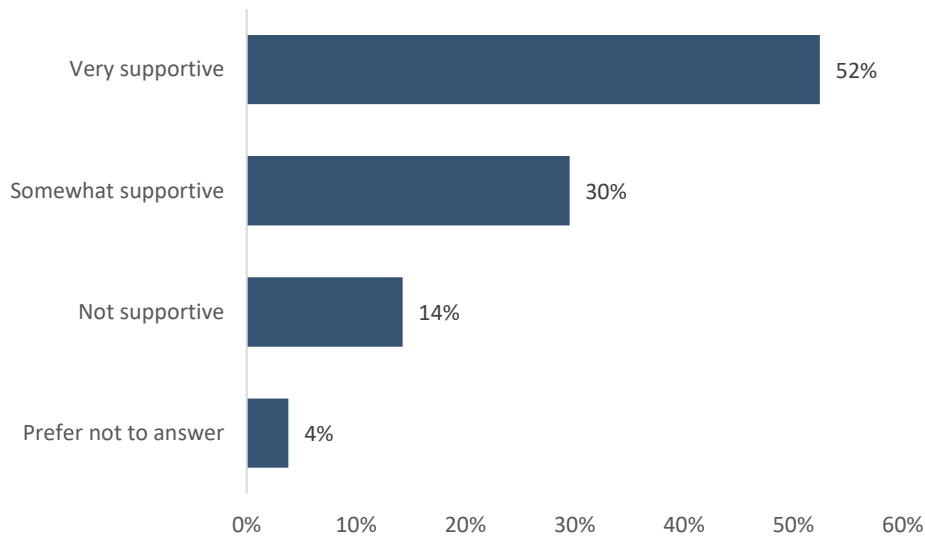
*Sample size: Indigenous: 33, Non-Indigenous: 309

Question 4: To what extent do you consider bear baiting a fair hunt?

Most respondents supported removing bear baiting to reduce human–bear conflict. Half of the respondents (52%) were very supportive of its removal, while 30% were somewhat supportive. Only 4% were not supportive (See Figure 11).



Figure 11: Support for removing baiting



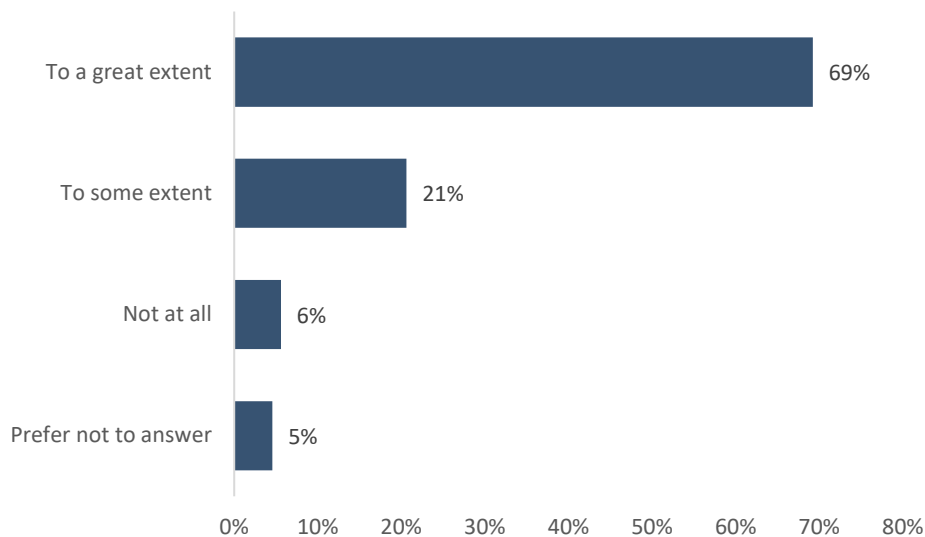
*Sample size: 393

Question 5: How supportive are you of the removal of bear baiting to reduce the risk of human-bear conflict?

Support for reporting the number or sex of bears killed

Respondents expressed support for mandatory reporting of the number and sex of bears harvested by all hunters. About 69% supported it to a great extent, and another 21% supported it to some extent (See Figure 12).

Figure 12: Support for reporting the number or sex of bears killed



*Sample size: 393

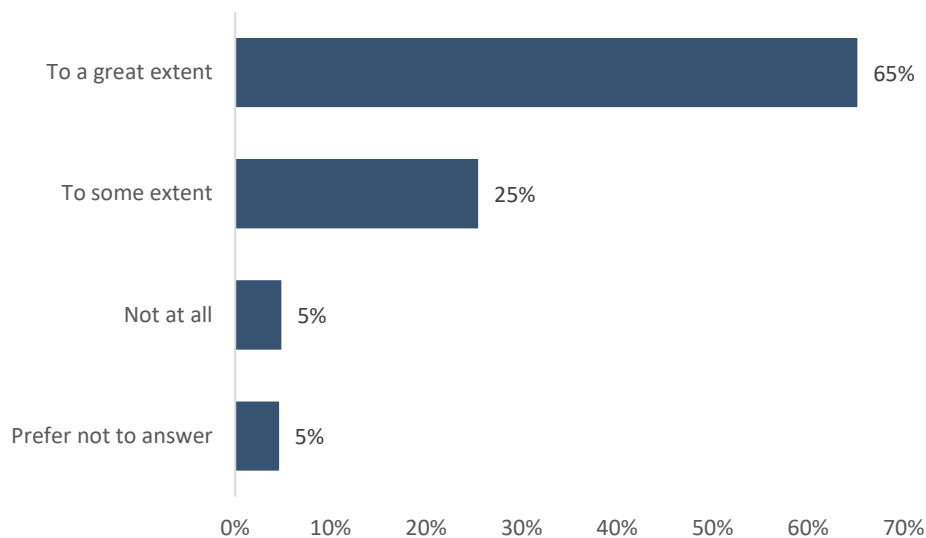
Question 6: How supportive are you of mandatory reporting for all bear hunters?

2.3 Support for the Ending of the Spring Black Bear hunt

A key goal of the study was to determine public support for the elimination of the Manitoba spring bear hunt. As noted in the survey, black bears are currently the only large mammal that can be hunted in the spring in the province. As part of the survey, all respondents were asked if this practice should be continued.

As highlighted in Figure 13, there was a very high level of support for the elimination of the spring bear hunt, as two-thirds of respondents (65%) strongly agreed that the Spring Bear hunt should be eliminated, and an additional 25% were somewhat supportive of the elimination of the Spring Bear hunt. Only 5% of respondents noted that they were in favour of retaining the spring bear hunt in its current format.

Figure 13: Support for ending the spring bear hunt



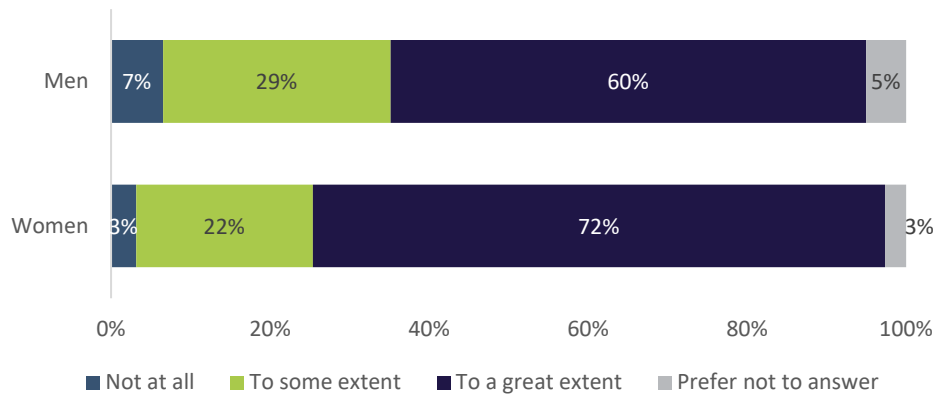
*Sample size: 393

Question 8: How supportive are you of ending the spring hunt?

In-depth analysis of the responses across different sub-groups suggests that the majority of respondents in all groups support ending the spring bear hunt. For example, while women were more supportive of the abolition of the spring bear hunt than were male respondents (72% versus 60%), the majority of respondents were still supportive of the elimination of the spring bear hunt (See Figure 14).



Figure 14: Support for ending the spring hunt by gender

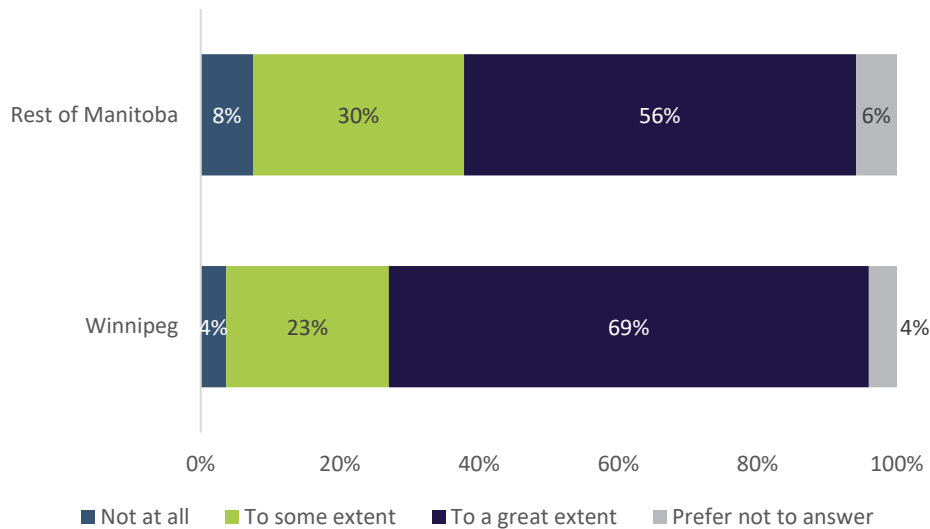


*Sample size: men: 199, women: 189

Question 8: How supportive are you of ending the spring hunt?

There were some modest differences in the support for the elimination of the spring bear hunt on the basis of region. For example, while 69% of respondents who resided in the Greater Winnipeg region were very supportive for ending the hunt, the level of support for the elimination of the spring bear hunt was lower among those respondents who lived in other regions of Manitoba, although to be clear, the majority of respondents in all regions were very supportive of eliminating the spring bear hunt (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: Support for ending the spring bear hunt by region



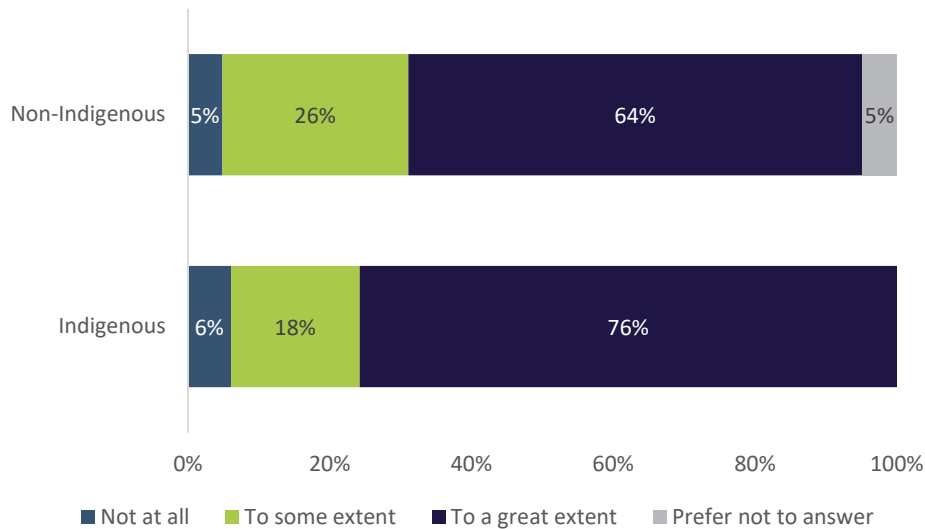
*Sample size: Winnipeg: 274, Rest of Manitoba: 199

Question 8: How supportive are you of ending the spring hunt?

The level of support was similar between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, although Indigenous respondents may be slightly more supportive of ending the hunt (See Figure 16). Caution should be exercised in the interpretation of findings with respect to Indigenous affiliation due to the small sample size of this group (n=33).



Figure 16: Support for ending the spring hunt by Indigenous identification



*Sample size: Indigenous: 33, Non-Indigenous: 309

Question 8: How supportive are you of ending the spring hunt?

2.4. Support for Mitigation Strategies to assist those Affected by the Possible Closure of the Spring Black Bear hunt

Recognizing that the elimination of the spring bear hunt could have ramifications for individuals who had some economic reliance on the spring bear hunt, respondents were asked to indicate their level of support for the introduction of a training program that would help such individuals (guides and outfitters) who relied on the hunt for their income. Specifically, respondents were asked:

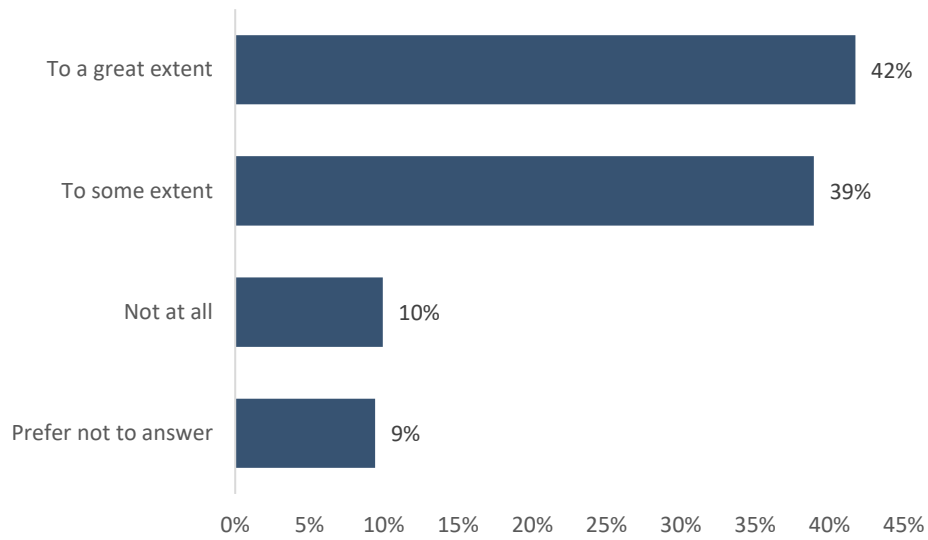
How supportive are you of retraining spring bear hunt guides for spring ecotourism activities to help guides transition away from a reliance on bear hunting in the spring?

□

Survey results suggest that, in general, Manitobans were inclined to provide some support (in the form of retraining) to those individuals who would be affected by the possible elimination of the spring bear hunt. For example, 42% of respondents were very supportive of the retraining option, and a further 39% supported it to some extent. Only 10% were not at all supportive of retraining guides (See Figure 17).



Figure 17: Support for retraining the spring bear hunt for spring ecotourism activities



*Sample size: 393

Question 7: How supportive are you of retraining spring bear hunt guides for spring ecotourism activities to help guides transition away from a reliance on bear hunting in the spring?

3. Conclusions

Most respondents supported ending the black bear spring hunt, even though many were unfamiliar with it. A majority viewed bear baiting as unfair and favoured eliminating it to help reduce human–bear conflicts. Mandatory harvest reporting received broad support as well. While ecotourism alternatives drew somewhat less enthusiasm, respondents still showed interest in moving toward other options.

The survey revealed significant support in public opinion regarding the end of the spring bear hunt in Manitoba. While women and Winnipeg respondents showed modestly higher and consistent support for ending the spring bear hunt more than did males and those respondents who lived outside of the Greater Winnipeg area, **the majority of respondents from all regions were supportive of the elimination of the Spring Bear hunt.**

Taken together, the results can inform future advocacy focused on protecting bear cubs and mothers and on promoting non-hunting tourism opportunities.