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NEWS, 5A

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Bear Warriors United fights Florida's December bear hunt

James Call
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

A wildlife conservation group has filed a complaint against the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, saying it violated state law in how it developed rules to resume an annual black bear hunting season.

In a challenge filed Aug. 15 with the state's Division of Administrative Hearings, Bear Warriors United argued the FWC's rules for a December hunt are an

improper use of its rule-making powers. The group's attorney, Raquel Levy of Daytona Beach, said the FWC did not follow its own procedures, violated its charter to include scientific data and public input in management decisions, and denied due process to the public.

Bear Warriors seeks to block the FWC from issuing any bear hunting permits until all legal appeals have been exhausted. The FWC does not comment on pending litigation.

Florida ended holding an annual bear

hunting season in 1994 when the bear population was around 1,000. Bears have since increased to around 4,000, based on projections from a 2014 count. A new bear population estimate is expected in 2030.

A coalition of conservation groups have been working to block the hunt ever since FWC chair Rodney Barreto directed the agency's biologists to develop a hunt last December. That request

See BEAR, Page 4A



Black bear sighting in Florida.
PROVIDED BY FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION



Robert Butler, one of the original Florida Highwaymen, will be inducted into the Polk County Arts and Culture Hall of Fame. RICK RUNION/THE LEDGER (2008)

THE NEXT CLASS

Six inductees into Polk Arts and Culture Hall of Fame revealed

Gary White
Lakeland Ledger
USA TODAY NETWORK

A beloved painter. A dance pioneer. A longtime force in theater.

Those three will join an educator and a trio of cultural promoters as the next class of inductees into the Polk Arts and Culture Hall of Fame announced Aug. 14.

The Polk Arts & Cultural Alliance will host a gala on Oct. 14 to honor the six inductees. They are the late Robert Butler of Lakeland (visual arts), Carol Krajacic Erkes of Winter Haven (arts educator), John and Terry Frost of Bartow (arts and cultural champions), the late Mimi Hardman of Lake Wales (cultural champion), the late Joe Mitchell of Lakeland (arts educator) and Alan Reynolds of Lakeland (theatre arts).

See INDUCTEES, Page 4A



Carol Krajacic Erkes, back, is the founder of Florida Dance Theatre. She is among six inductess into the Polk Arts and Culture Hall of Fame. ERNST PETERS/THE LEDGER

Could Polk's US reps face new districts for 2026 elections?

Gary White
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USA TODAY NETWORK

For U.S. House members facing two-year election cycles, the campaigning never really ends.

All four representatives from Polk County are seeking additional terms in 2026. The question is: What districts will they be running in?

The possibility of an unprecedented, mid-decade redrawing of congressional maps has created uncertainty around the districts now held by Rep. Scott Franklin, R-Lakeland; Rep. Laurel Lee, R-Tampa; Rep. Darren Soto, D-Kissimmee; and Rep. Daniel Webster, R-Clermont.

President Donald Trump has been pressuring states to redraw maps, in hopes of boosting Republicans' chances of retaining their narrow majority in the U.S. House. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has signaled support for a revision of Florida's maps, under which Republicans now hold 20 of 28 House seats.

Florida House Speaker Daniel Perez, R-Miami, announced on Aug. 7 that he would create a committee in September to study redistricting.

The Florida Constitution directs the Legislature to create new congressional maps every 10 years, using U.S.

See ELECTIONS, Page 2A



U.S. Rep. Darren Soto, D-Kissimmee, left, accuses Republicans of trying to "choose their voters" as President Donald Trump pushes for redistricting ahead of the 2026 midterm elections. ERNST PETERS/THE LEDGER

