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Grandfather Mauled by Black Bear in 'Unheard of' Attack Has Died, Arkansas Officials Confirm

The 72-year-old was attacked while working on his tractor by the side of the road. His family had said he was unlikely to survive his injuries

By Dac Collins / Published Sep 16, 2025 12:27 PM EDT



Officials said it was the first bear attack on a human in Arkansas in at least 25 years. Photo by Andrea Izzotti / Adobe Stock

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Officials with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission say the man who was attacked by a black bear in Franklin County on Sept. 3 has died. The 72-year-old man, identified as Vernon Patton, passed away in the hospital Sunday as a result of his injuries, according to AGFC chief of communications Keith Stephens, who confirmed Patton's passing with local news outlets on Monday.

“It was a pretty severe attack,” Stephens told the *Arkansas Times*. “It attacked him on his face, his arms, his upper body.”



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The tragic update followed a public statement from Patton's family the week prior. On Sept. 10, they said he was still in intensive care but unlikely to survive. The family also asked for privacy as they worked through an extraordinarily difficult time.

“Our beloved father, grandfather, husband and hero, Vernon Patton, was seriously injured in a bear attack while doing what he loved, working on his land with his family,” their statement from last week read. “Vernon is currently being cared for in the ICU in

Little Rock. While he remains in stable condition, his injuries are extensive and ultimately not survivable.”

As reported previously by OL, Patton was working on his tractor on the side of a gravel road in the Mulberry Mountain area when the black bear attacked him on Sept. 3. His son witnessed the attack and was able to get the bear off him. First responders airlifted the 72-year-old to a hospital in Fayetteville, and from there he was transferred to the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock.

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Stephens said at the time that the bear weighed around 70 to 80 pounds and was likely a yearling. AGFC officers responded that same day to the Mulberry Mountain area, where they quickly located the bear and killed it. Wildlife officials then took the carcass to a lab for a necropsy; they confirmed on Sept. 8 that the bear had tested negative for rabies and distemper.

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Another AGFC communications official, Trey Reid, called the unprovoked attack “unheard of” in an interview with reporters soon after the incident took place. Reid said he’d never heard of a black bear attacking a human in Arkansas during his 20 years with the agency, and that it was the first such attack to occur in the state in at least 25 years.



Dac Collins

News Editor

Dac Collins is the News Editor at Outdoor Life. He helps tell the latest stories about America’s hunters and anglers while reporting on critical conservation issues, oftentimes with a fly rod or shotgun in hand. He lives in Colorado with his wife and son.

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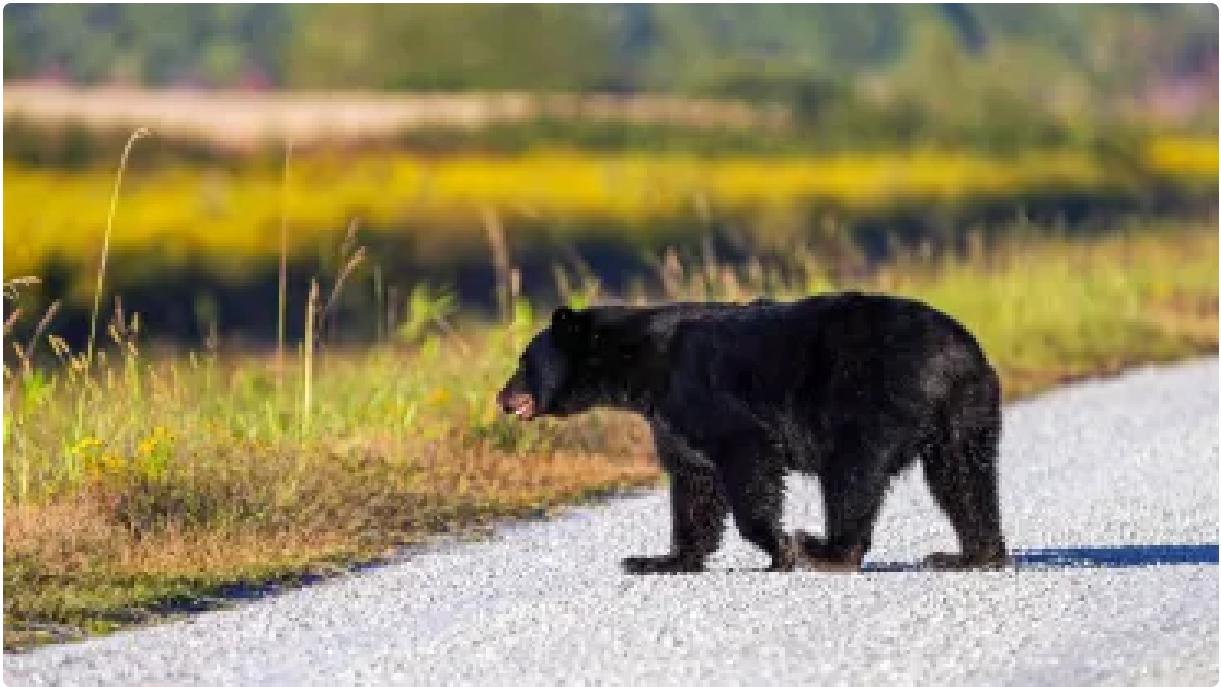


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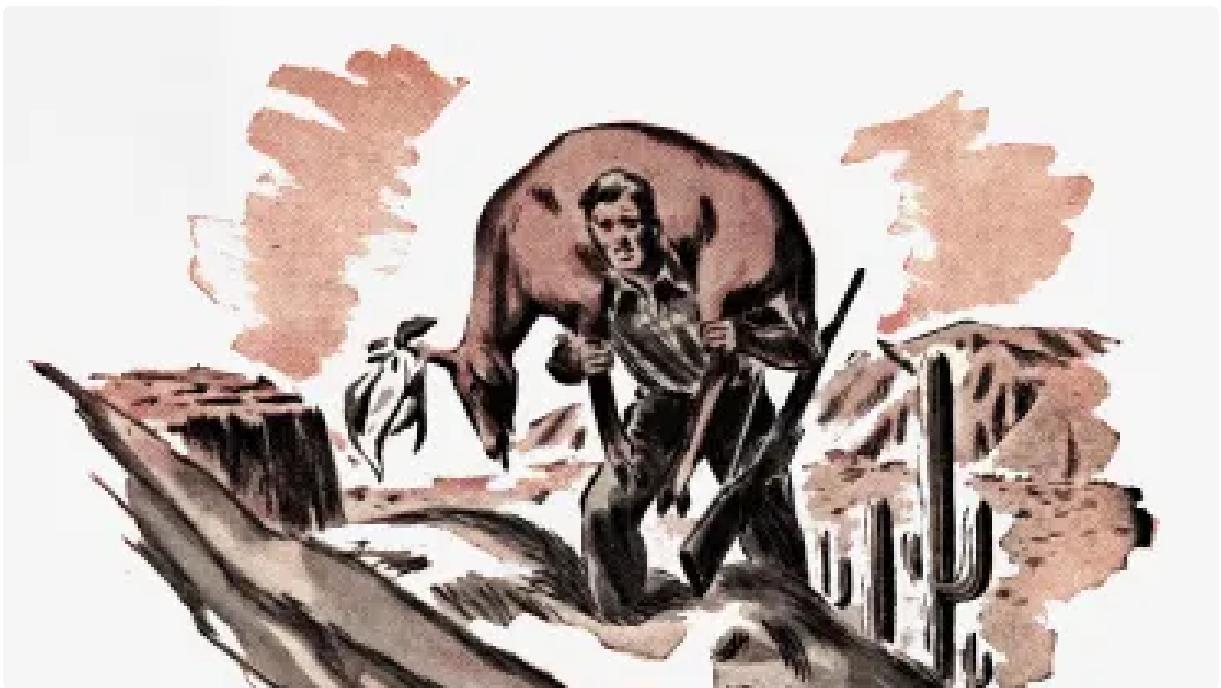
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