Application for Best Festival or Event Over \$75,000 in Budget

NC Black Bear Festival

Judges' score - 8.2

Detailed description of the event

Created in 2015, the NC Black Bear Festival goal is to celebrate our state's little-known superlative that coastal North Carolina has the world's largest black bears and the highest black bear densities on the planet. Each year the event features over 30 educational and fun activities for the entire family. But in 2022 we offered over 40 activities! Our 2022 event was the largest Bear Fest yet with 30,000+ attendees. For comparison, our first year attracted an estimated 7,000 guests. It has become the most successful festival in the region of the state. One of the keys to our success has been that each year we change things. We add new features and add surprises to keep people guessing and keep them coming back. We always inject into our event new creative ideas and embellishments.

Last year we added a "Can You Out Run A Bear?" Race which is a 40-yard dash. Participants receive a free sticker for whatever animal they out ran, whether it was a turtle, a mouse, a squirrel, or a rabbit. It has an educational component, because it illustrates in a fun way that no human can out run a bear. But in 2022 we decided to turn our event on its head and create something totally new and radical. So, we added an air show or we called a "B'Air Show" in addition to everything we were already offering our loyal fans! The B'Air Show was quite an undertaking. There was distinct learning curve to take on this ambitious and involved endeavor. We had to search for elements to be included in the airshow we could afford, see if they were available and then work with the FAA and Emergency Management to develop an approved plan and then execute it. We had to find and hire an Air Boss, which is a specialized, authorized mobile air traffic controller of sorts. He became our liaison with the FFA and was involved in every detail of the B'Air Show. He even helped us find air show performers. The B'Air show headliner was to be a narrated program by the Army's elite Golden Knights Skydiving Team. There were two major hurdles. First, could we get them to come to little old Plymouth and secondly, could we afford them. The answer turned out to be "Yes" to both. The cost was \$12,000. We determined that we could not afford that, so we shelved the idea. But over the course of time, we found out if the event was educational, we might be able to get them for free - and we did! The Golden Knights came to Plymouth and put on an incredible show! They jumped from 12,000' and demonstrated amazing precision jumping skills. With smoke grenades on their feet, they fee-fall thousands of feet at a terminal speed of 150 to 180mph before deploying their chutes. Even then they come in hot, at speeds of up to 60mph before slowing to land! But it is more than just speed, their demonstrations included acrobatics and precision movements and landing in front of a cheering fans. Imagine "Old Glory" floating from the parachute of one of the Golden Knights! The entire program was a huge crowd favorite.

The B'Air Show also included another completely new element. I had heard of a Turkey Drop in Yellville, Arkansas, and I thought, why not have a Bear Drop?! I purchased a variety of test subjects - several types of plush bears to experiment with. I purchased 17" parachutes from Amazon and then using rubber bands we attached a parachuter to each bear. We did extensive "test flights", first dropping them simultaneously from a 2-story building and then a 200' crane to identify which bear fell at the slowest rate of speed. Then we ordered 300 of that particular bear and 300 parachutes. We mailed a box of bears to our helicopter ride provider, Total Flight Solutions, in Louisburg to devise the best way to deploy the bears. They were totally onboard and thought it was a fantastic idea. They even sponsored our T-shirts. We incorporated their helicopter into the design. They created a "bear chute" so they could drop a steady stream of bears from the helicopter instead of handfuls at a time. The FFA would not allow us to fly over the crowd unless it was at 1,500' and who knows where the wind would have carried them. But rather than abandon the idea, we created a work-around. We had roped off a Landing Zone (LZ) for the Golden Knights. So, we determined to drop the bears over the empty LZ and release the kids into the roped off area after the helicopter had dropped the bears and left. All the instructions were communicated over a loudspeaker. We kept the crowd back behind the ropes while the helicopter appeared over the trees and began dropping the first batch of bears. It was an amazing sight to see dozens of little black bears floating down out of the sky! Our plan had worked! Once the helicopter left, we released the children 5 years-old and younger to get a head start before letting older kids go. It was hilarious to see hundreds of kids sprinting across the fields to grab their bear. The helicopter made a total of 5 drops. It was the biggest

event of the day for the kids and something they will never forget! In addition, to the B'Air Show headliners, we also had a flight formation team do fly-overs to wow the crowd, as well as hot air balloon rides, biplane rides, helicopter rides. The hot air balloon added a magical element to the festival! It was not only a great visual during the day, but at night it was a giant colorful black bear lantern!!! For most people this was their first closeup look at a hot air balloon. If the B'Air Show wasn't enough, we also had "New for '22", a Las Vegas-style dinosaur production with Ed's Dinosaurs Live, a fire artist, rowing races and the pre-fireworks concert by Bill Deal and the Rhondels.

The event's popularity has a lot to do with the broad appeal of black bears along with a heaping helping of fun and creativity. No matter what age or interests a person has, almost everyone loves bears! Therefore, the festival's mainstay is a dozen bear-themed activities. They include wild bear tours conducted on a local wildlife refuge, as well as presentations by the NC Black Bear Biologists, free black bear and wildlife photography presentations an educational black bear film produced locally, Bear-Ology Black Bear Museum, Bear Towne Market, Baby Bear Dress-Up Contest, Bear Necessities Paddle, Run with the Bears 5K, the Bear Drop with 300 parachuting plush bears, hot air balloon rides with black bears on the balloon, balloons twisted into bears and a children's bear train ride. The World-Famous Julie Beck reported in a seminar at ShowFest last year that no festival carries their theme throughout their event like the NC Black Bear Festival. We have an NFL-style inflatable black bear tunnel at our entrance. We have a life-sized chainsaw carved black bear phone charging station. We have a chainsaw carving making bears and black bear cutout-outs, signs and tents that are all bear themed.

This festival is unique not just because of its black bear focus, but also because it is located on the banks of the Roanoke River, which is NC's Amazon with over 50 miles of shoreline within 5 miles of Plymouth on the Roanoke River Delta. Events taking place on the water include airboat rides, free pontoon boat rides, a Bear Necessities Paddle, Lazy River Tubing, kayak rentals, and a kid's fishing event. Also taking place on the river was the eye popping, jaw dropping, heart stopping, spectacular "Reflections on the Roanoke" animated laser and fireworks show with 6 barges on the river! People go nuts over this incredible show. We regularly have people coming up to us saying, I used to live in ______ and this was way better! Some of those cities listed include not just those scattered all over NC, but also Annapolis, MD, Philadelphia, PA, New York City and even Disney World! Many people tell us that we have spoiled them because they can't enjoy fireworks shows anywhere else. Some of the reasons our show is so unique include, that we have a half mile of waterfront, giving everyone a front row seat. Secondly, is the synchronization of six multiple fireworks barges up and down the river shooting in concert with one another. Lastly are the reflections of the fireworks on the water that make it double the pleasure. It is the "Hallelujah" at the end of a fun-filled family day.

Amazingly, we have never had any paid staff. But this year, with the availability of Stephanie McIntyre stepping down from the Seafood Festival, I immediately hired her as a consultant to take our event to the next level, particularly with sponsorships. She worked with me to develop a new sponsorship package and worked on a new website. She became the de facto Assistant Director of the NC Black Bear Festival, bringing contacts, experience, relationships, professionalism and organization. Our 2022 Budget was \$140,000. We had 85 volunteers. The NC Black Bear Festival prides itself in providing family-oriented education and fun. In addition, we offer free admission and many free activities, despite the challenges and rising costs. In 2022, the NC Black Bear Festival blossomed and became 3 incredible festivals in one. It became a Bear Festival + a River Festival + a B'Air Show = Best. Day. Ever.

Estimated number of attendees?

30,000+

Environmental or pet-friendly? Explain how.

Pet Friendly. We allow pets on a leash and provide watering stations.

NORTH CAROLINA BLACK BEAR FESTIVAL

PLYMOUTH, NG WWW.NGBEARFEST.COM

June 4, 2022 Bear Fest + River Fest + Air Show = Best. Day. Ever. WWW.NCBearFest.com



40 Reasons Not To Miss Bear Fest 2022!

- 1. Wild Bear Tours
- 2. Run with the Bears 5K
- 3. Bear Necessities Paddle
- 4. Kayak Rental
- 5. Rowing Race
- 6. Airboat Rides
- 7. Helicopter Rides
- 8. Biplane Rides
- 9. Pontoon Boat Rides
- 10. Lazy River Tubing Rides
- 11. Bear Train Rides
- 12. "Can You Outrun a Bear?" Race
- 13. Black Bear Theater
- 14. Presentation by the State Bear Biologist
- 15. Presentation on Wildlife Photography
- 16. Papa Bear Car Show
- 17. All Museums Open with Free Admission
- 18. Ed's Dinosaur Show
- 19. Over 100 Vendors
- 20. Bear Towne Market

- 21. Kid's Fishing
- 22. Baby Bear Contest
- 23. Joy the Clown
- 24. Shark Tooth Dig
- 25. Face Painting
- 26. Balloon Twisting
- 27. Water Slides
- 28. Chainsaw Carving
- 29. Cowboy Stilt Walker
- 30. Skydiving Bears
- 31. Flight Formation Team
- 32. Golden Knights Skydiving Team
- 33. Bear Drop (dropping 300 plush bears)
- 34. Hot Air Balloon Rides
- 35. Live Music
- 36. Fire Artist
- 37. Street Performers
- 38. Laser Animation Show
- 39. Reflections on the Roanoke Fireworks Show
- 40. NC Black Bear Festival Bass Tournament



Bear Fest



River Fest



B'Air Show



June 4, 2022 www.NCBearFest.com







North Carolina Black Bear Festival, Inc. 2022 Budget

Income	
Vendors	18,000
Events and Attractions	14,000
Sponsors	96,000
Total Income	128,000
Expense	
Events and Attractions	71,000
Advertising	31,000
Tent Rentals, Sound System & Other	24,000
Total Expense	126,000
Net Income over(under) Expense	2,000