

North Lake Tahoe Bonanza

700-pound bear's fate all-but determined as Tahoe officials continue search

by Kevin MacMillan
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December 2, 2009

INCLINE VILLAGE, Nev. — In her nine years running Incline Door Company, Jennifer Pranin has never seen anything like this.

"I'd say we've been getting four to six calls per week, pretty much since the springtime ... that's probably on average of five repairs a week," said Pranin, who co-owns the Incline Village garage-door repair business with her husband, Dean. "I mean, he's not wearing one of our T-shirts or anything ... we have had people jokingly ask if he's on our payroll."

"He" is the 700-pound black bear that wildlife officials have been chasing the past three years — a chase that has become high stakes because of the more than \$70,000 in damage officials say he has caused this year alone.

Apparently, garage doors are his specialty.

"The garage break-in bear is what we call him," said Ann Bryant, executive director of the BEAR League. "It's so easy for him to go and just bust out those wood panels. For awhile it was because he knew there was food (in garages), but now he's so conditioned he's just breaking them down randomly now."

Jennifer Pranin estimates her company — which has seen steady business from this particular bear's carnage since spring — brings in about \$250 per service, or about \$1,200 a week.

While the money is welcome during a stagnant economy, Pranin said it doesn't come without a silver lining.

"It's good news on one level, but it's not necessarily particularly how we'd like to do it," she said



This season, the 700-pound bear that wildlife officials have been chasing hasn't had any trouble breaking into garages and sheds like these.

Bonanza File Photo

A pre-determined future

Regardless of if or how the bear is caught, one thing is clear: It already has a death sentence.

“Our policy always has been is if they're breaking into homes and garages, they are a public safety issue and they will be euthanized,” said Carl Lackey, Nevada Department of Wildlife biologist, assuring the wildlife department's three-strike rule for nuisance bears would not apply in this instance.

But catching the bear — as has proven to be the case the past three years — isn't going to be easy, he said. And that's not being helped by certain residents in the area.

“The problem is people aren't calling us until the next day, or not at all. If they called us or the sheriff's office as it was happening, we might be able to get there in time,” Lackey said. “They'd rather see other people come out and coax the bear away, and that's what we don't want happening.”

Bryant said the league — a nonprofit bear awareness organization based in Homewood — has received several calls this year regarding the big bear.

“Often the people who call us are those who don't want to see the bear get hurt,” she said. “Of course, we can't do anything about it. We are not an enforcement agency. If we could, we would do what we could to keep the bear from getting killed, but it's pretty obvious this bear needs to be taken off the streets.”

Residents deliberately not calling NDOW presents a troubling problem, Lackey said, one that makes the wildlife department wary of publicizing where it is setting traps and surveying property.

“If I told you where we were trapping, people would probably go out and sabotage the traps,” he said. “We see it all the time.”

Bryant said no one within her organization is out sabotaging traps, and she said the league never condones the behavior.

But that doesn't mean it doesn't happen.

“We get blamed for (sabotaging) traps all the time, but we'd never tamper with anything; it's illegal,” Bryant said. “But it does happen around here with other people. There's been times in the past where we'll get private calls from people who tell us, ‘well we don't have to worry about any bears getting stuck in that trap.’”

An unlikely alternative

Earlier this week, Bryant, in an attempt to save the bear's life, offered Lackey a compromise.

“I've talked to Carl about possibly getting some collaboration going, to see if we all can put our heads together and find a sanctuary for this bear,” Bryant said. “He's obviously crossed that line, and we agree he shouldn't be out there. We don't like to kill bears, but the last thing we need is for him to be in a garage full of stuff and someone gets home and doesn't realize he's there, and he gets scared and traps her.”

“But since it's so divided out there with the community on if the bear should be killed or not, if we can get this bear to a sanctuary where it's nowhere near people or homes, that would be great.”

But Lackey isn't fond of the idea.

“That's a fairy tale really is all it is, and even if we wanted to do something like that, it's not really feasible,” Lackey said. “Trying to get a (sanctuary) to accept a black bear cub, let alone a full-grown male, is just unrealistic. There's too many black bears. We just don't have an appetite to do that.”

What do you think?

If the bear is captured, should it be killed? Let us know by voting online at

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