

North Lake Tahoe Bonanza^{beta}



Bear problems down in Incline Village

By Tanya Canino
Bonanza Editor

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A bear cruising waterfront homes in the Marla Bay area of South Lake Tahoe.



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Nevada Department of Wildlife officials euthanized a 100-pound bear Monday in Crystal Bay, a disappointment in a summer so far marked by a notable decrease in bear activity.

Bear activity has dropped significantly from last summer, according to wildlife biologist Carl Lackey, due in part to better forage for the bears, but also better behavior from the human residents of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

“It has been, from my perspective, quite a bit slower than last year,” said Lackey, with the Nevada Department of Wildlife.

The yearling in Crystal Bay had been breaking into homes, after learning to visit the neighborhood in the mornings on trash day, said Thad Heater, a wildlife biologist hired by NDOW for the summer season.

“In that neighborhood, the people are pretty good about taking care of their garbage,” Heater said.

The young female bear probably learned bad habits from its mother last year, he said, adding that NDOW set traps for it twice this month before catching it Monday. The bear had broken into at least three homes and may have accessed a few others, Heater said, adding that the break-ins caused the bear to be deemed a public safety problem.

Monday’s euthanization is one of four that NDOW has done this summer, with three other euthanizations occurring after bears were badly hurt by cars, Heater said.

The Nevada Division of Wildlife personnel handled 1,531 complaints in 2007, compared to 350 in 2006. So far this year, Lackey said complaints are way down, although calls to the bear hotline (775-688-BEAR) for bear awareness information have increased.

One reason is that moisture in May resulted in more berries and natural food sources for the bears, Lackey said.

Ann Bryant, of the BEAR League, also noted that bear activity is down, especially in the Incline Village area where tough trash restrictions and heightened public awareness is making an impact.

“It’s definitely not as chaotic as last year,” Bryant said. “One of the largest contributing factors, especially in Incline Village, to less sightings is the tremendous work by IVGID. It shows.”

The Incline Village General Improvement District implemented tougher ordinances on trash and wildlife violations last year — the latest set going into effect this month.

The IVGID ordinance says that trash cannot be taken to the curb before 5 a.m. on trash day, and if wildlife gets into trash a property owner must pay a \$300 fine with the mandatory use of a wildlife resistant waste cart supplied by IVGID. On second offense, the fine is \$1,000. Either first offense or second offense fines are refundable with the installation of a wildlife resistant container.

Another impact on bear activity in the community is using Ponderosa Property Management to respond 24 hours a day to clean up trash violations. Anyone can call (775) 832-1221 about spilled trash or trash cans out at night, she said.

“We’ve made big strides over what was happening last year,” said IVGID Resource Conservationist Madonna Dunbar. “We have taken big steps quickly, although the town is not 100 percent bear-proof yet.”

Most of the Dumpsters in town are now bear-proof and IVGID has replaced all trash cans on its beaches and parks with bear-proof cans, she said. The district has also been proactive with public education and going to homeowners associations to discuss the problem, she said.

“We’re being used as a model community now,” she said, explaining that IVGID has received calls from organizations in Oregon about its trash ordinances.

“IVGID is the only one in the Washoe County area that has taken proactive steps,” said Lackey.

Still, problems persist, he said, such as the bear in Crystal Bay which learned to visit the neighborhood about 8 a.m. on trash day, Lackey said.

“The bears learn pretty quick. The metal-proof containers are the only sure way to solve the problem,” Lackey said, faulting the homeowners in Crystal Bay with not using bear-proof containers.

Another issue is visitors who may not know how to handle bears, Bryant said.

“I think most of the locals are up-to-speed on everything. It’s the visitors who panic,” she said.

Although bear activity has been less than last year so far, both Bryant and Lackey note that fall is when the bears become more active in seeking food.

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