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Friday	Saturday	Sunday
48 31	44 26	48 24

W E E K E N D

Bear advocates set for summer

By Andy Bourelle
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A group of West Shore residents were outraged last summer when a mother

The Bear Preservation League can be reached at (530) 542-PAWS

bear and her cub were killed by California wildlife officials. What those residents have done since then is create a volunteer organization

to help prevent that from happening again.

The Bear Preservation League has 80 members who are trained and ready to respond to bear complaints throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin.

"I hope the bears are ready for us, because we're ready for them," said Ann Bryant, a founding member of the league.

When California Fish and Game receives complaints about bears — as it did for the August 1998 killing in Homewood — officials will first contact

Advocates

Continued from Page 1A

the Bear Preservation League. Bryant then will contact the nearest team leader to the complaint, and a group of trained league members will respond. The team will talk with and educate the complaining residents or tourists about bears — and about keeping trash and food away from them.

Volunteers also can respond to calls made directly to the league.

A small group of residents — formerly strangers to one another — formed the Bear Preservation League after the killing of the Homewood bear and her cub. Another cub was abandoned.

California Fish and Game officials usually kill bears when responding to complaints, and the Bear Preservation League set out to change that. The two groups met in November 1998, and Fish and Game jumped at the chance to have community members respond to the complaints.

On the east side of the basin, the Nevada Department of Wildlife uses an aversion technique to deter bears from being around humans, essentially making them fear humans. Only after a bear repeatedly causes problems do officials kill it.

Still, Bryant said, Nevada is interested in working with the league, and the two agencies plan to meet soon. Until then, however, the Bear Preservation League can respond to Nevada calls if people contact the league directly.

"We've got enough people to go all the way around the lake to respond to calls," Bryant said.

Two seminars were held this month and last month, where the volunteers were trained by wildlife officials about how to respond.

"We want to educate (residents concerned about bear problems). We will look for attractants, explain methods of deterrence, tell them what the neighborhood is doing wrong," Bryant said. "We want to avert a lot of potential problems before its too late."

See *Advocates*, Page 2A