



A quiet year for bears

Bear activity lower than previous summers

By Greyson Howard

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A young bear fishes for kokanee in Taylor creek on Tuesday afternoon.

Jim Grant / Tahoe Daily Tribune

One bear was found dead with its gall bladder removed. A few cubs were rescued — including Lil' Smokey, a 6-month-old black bear with burnt paws.

But overall, the summer of 2008 was a quiet one for bears in the Truckee-Tahoe region.

"It was actually about one-third as busy as last year," said Ann Bryant of the BEAR League.

In comparison, Bryant said this year 12 bears were killed by cars to last season's 78, and the BEAR League's call volume went from 100 to 200 calls a day to around 50.

"I think we had a wonderful berry crop this year so they didn't have to come into town for food," Bryant said.

Lil' Smokey, the cub rescued from a fire in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest earlier in the summer, is recovering from second- and third-degree burns on its paws at Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, Bryant said.

"They took the last bootie off one-and-a-half weeks ago," Bryant said. "He will be releasable into the wild."

Along with six other rescued cubs, Lil' Smokey could be released this winter into dens set up for them to hibernate the rest of the winter, and wake up as wild bears in the spring, Bryant said.

The investigation continues into the bear found dead along Highway 89 South in August with its gall bladder removed, said Mark Lucero, patrol captain with the California Department of Fish and Game.

Taking a bear's gall bladder is illegal. The organ can be sold on the black market for as much as \$5,000. A surgical glove was found alongside the carcass.

“The glove is still at the Department of Justice for finger prints,” Lucero said.

He said it appears that the bear was hit by a car accidentally, and whoever removed the organ happened upon it afterward.

“My theory is with last year’s 78 road kills somebody got it in their mind that that was 78 gall bladders and bought themselves a police scanner,” Bryant said. “The BEAR league has received some really promising tips.”

Truckee tackling bear education

Truckee Town Council Thursday night approved a bear awareness education campaign, said Council Member Richard Anderson.

According to a town staff report, the bilingual campaign will include displays, events, homeowners association events, and other material working with local businesses and Tahoe Truckee Sierra Disposal.

After a year of monitoring the success of the education program, the town could then consider an ordinance requiring people to prevent the intrusion of animals, said Alex Terrazas, assistant to the Truckee town manager.

Ann Bryant of the BEAR League said an ordinance is necessary to tackle the problem.

“You have to hit them in their pocketbooks and hit them with the law,” Bryant said. “Education is good but if they don’t care, they don’t care.”

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Back to top