

Nuisance Problem Becoming Bearable

By Aaron Meier

What would you call having to deal with nearly 300 reports of bears encroaching on urban areas? Carl Lackey, Nevada Department of Wildlife Biologist, calls it a slow year, but he's not complaining.

Last year, Nevada's bears roaming into urban areas searching for food became national news with bears showing up at fast food restaurants and in people's kitchens on a consistent basis. NDOW personnel handled 1,531 bear complaints in 2007 alone. This year, however, those complaints have dropped off dramatically.

"The number of calls have decreased considerably this year, by 1,200 or more," said Lackey. "We point to two main reasons for the decline. First, the May rains we received were at the perfect time for producing grasses, forbs and berries. There is simply much more available in the way of natural foods for bears than last year. Second, Douglas County passed their ordinance county wide and Incline Village instituted their ordinance on trash, both of which were highly publicized. Incline's ordinance has proven to be very effective."

It appears human-bear conflicts will continue to be a growing concern as bear populations occupy habitat that is being encroached upon by human development. There were no major issues regarding black bears or significant human-bear interactions in Nevada until 1987. A severe drought ending that year caused bears to begin frequenting urbanized areas in search of food. The result has created problems. All aspects of black bear ecology have been altered by human food-conditioning, such as how long bears spend in their dens and where they live throughout the year. Additionally, reports of human/bear conflicts have risen dramatically. Lackey explains that bear complaints have risen sharply in the last ten years, due in part to the

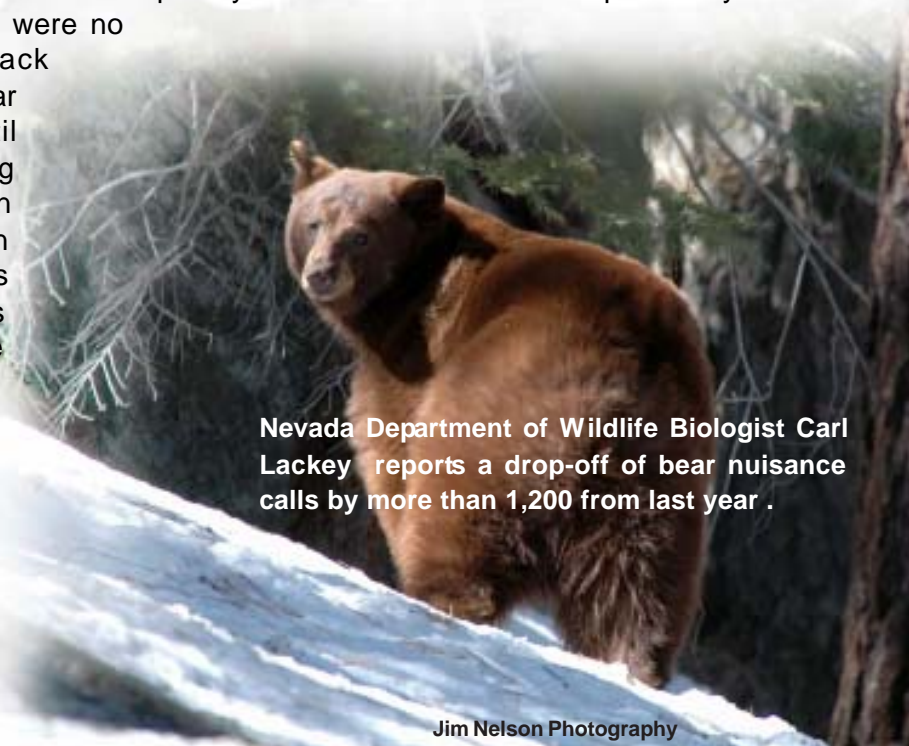
increase in people living in bear habitat.

"People don't recognize a lot of the times that they live in wildland habitat, but anywhere along the Carson Front, from Reno to Gardnerville, including the Tahoe Basin and associated mountain ranges, is bear habitat. Areas like Galena Forest on the Mt. Rose Hwy were historically good wildlife habitat for bears. People assume that because they build a house there that the wildlife automatically leaves," explains Lackey. "When you look at it from the wildlife's point of view, the area is now better for them than it was before people encroached. We are talking about a year-round supply of food that is replenished every week on garbage night."

While new county ordinances and educating the public have helped, Lackey believes that the problem will continue to grow until there is 100 percent compliance with removing all human food sources, a public that is educated on how to live carefully alongside bears, and tolerance of wildlife when you are living in the forest.

"We caught a break this year," said Lackey, "we can only prepare better for next year to see what Mother Nature brings."

"Because of the ordinances in place this year we have had a lot more "previously conditioned"



Nevada Department of Wildlife Biologist Carl Lackey reports a drop-off of bear nuisance calls by more than 1,200 from last year .

Jim Nelson Photography

bears, that have become accustomed to certain behaviors, breaking into homes and garages looking for the food that they have been eating for years. Although we had fewer recaptures as well as fewer overall captures, the number of bears euthanized for behavior deemed hazardous increased,” reports Lackey.

Under NDOW policy, bears that cause damage or are a threat to human safety must be humanely euthanized.

“It’s a shame when we are forced to put down a food-conditioned bear, but if the new ordinances work, we can reduce the number overall long term, making both people and bears safer.

When a bear is released back into the wild, NDOW uses specially trained Karelian Bear Dogs in combination with aversive conditioning tools and structured learning situations to teach

Nevada Department of Wildlife Biologist Carl Lackey draws blood from a captured bear.



bears to recognize and avoid human territory.

“It has good short term effectiveness in keeping bears away, but remember, it is designed to modify their behavior (avoiding humans) and is not intended to make them leave an area. This can mean simply reverting to nocturnal behavior when humans aren’t around as much.”

Fowl Play!

By Joe Doucette

It was a beautiful fall day for the 25 youngsters and parents from around Elko County who showed up for the 6th annual Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Youth Waterfowl Expo. The event, hosted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) and Ducks Unlimited (DU), 4-H Shooting Sports and Safari Club International is held every year in September to introduce youth to the waterfowl and hunting opportunities that can be found at Ruby Lake NWR and surrounding areas.

According to Jeff Mackay, USFWS biologist, “While Nevada is the driest state in the country, areas like Ruby Lake NWR provide excellent waterfowl hunting opportunities that few hunters take advantage of.”

Mackay adds that the goal of the Expo is to not only introduce young people to the Refuge and its opportunities, but to start giving them the skills needed to take advantage of them.

“Activities the kids participated in on Saturday included duck banding, learning how to put out decoys, and duck calling,” stated Mackay. Other activities included hunter ethics, a trap range, an air rifle range and LaserShot, an interactive



Michael Timm of Spring Creek practices his "call back" call.