

For now, wet weather means fewer Tahoe bear problems

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

When it comes to weather's impact on bear problems, biologists are hoping for not too much of a good thing.

A wet winter set the stage for healthy summer forage in the mountains, a situation that would probably have fewer black bears raiding garbage, breaking into homes and otherwise causing trouble.

But if winter-like storms continue too late into the summer, the opposite could prove true.

"It really depends on how late it lasts," said Carl Lackey, a biologist and bear expert with the Nevada Department of Wildlife.

During the record year of bear problems in 2007, when the department received more than 1,500 complaints over bears, the problem was drought. Dry conditions withered berry bushes that bears depend upon as a natural food source, driving many wild bears into neighborhoods in the Reno-Tahoe area to raid for food.

Opposite conditions last year had frosty storms hit the mountains through June and produce a different problem.

"It basically freezer-burned a lot of berries," Lackey said. "It just froze all the berry-producing shrubs that bears rely upon in late summer and fall."

The result was another very busy year for bear troubles, with about 450 complaints received.

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