

Nevada not alone in bear hunt controversy

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Hunters might be quietly stalking Nevada's woods, but the policy decision that put them there was decidedly noisy.

It packed meeting rooms, led to candlelight vigils and marches on the governor's mansion.

Nevada's first black bear hunt, now under way and possibly nearing an end, is described as the state's most contentious wildlife issue in recent memory.

"It's been mega-controversial," said Chris Healy, spokesman for the Nevada Department of Wildlife.

Nevada's inaugural bear hunt is one sow away from the end of the season after a fifth female was killed over the weekend. Regulations adopted by the state Wildlife Commission set a limit of 20 bears that can be killed; of those, no more than six can be female. Since the season opened Aug. 20, hunters have killed 12 bears – five females and seven males.

But Nevada is far from unique. The issue of bear hunting, now allowed in at least 33 states, has brought impassioned debate in plenty of places.

It happened in California, where a proposal to allow as many as 2,000 bears to be hunted quickly found opposition, forcing plans to be scaled back. It happened in Kentucky, where a proposal to allow harvest of only half the 20 allowed killed in Nevada still stirred up some folks.

It's happened in New Jersey – like Nevada, a flash point for the debate.

The Garden State is now gearing up for its 2011 bear hunt after 592 bears were killed in December 2010, said Lawrence Hajna, spokesman for the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

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