

Opinion: Learn to live with bears to keep them alive

By Jennifer Fearing

The controversy swirling around one Placer County bear family is, sadly, nothing new to the many communities that are seeing a resurgence in black bear populations. Like so many other wildlife species, bear populations are experiencing a slow crawl back to normal after being decimated by human exploitation.

Part of that return has them crossing paths with people who build homes deep in bear country – or in the suburbs through which bears occasionally pass but do not stay.

Given their size and potential to do harm, bears create remarkably few conflicts for people. Normally shy and inoffensive, they are, however, famously known to be formidable in protecting their young, and unfortunately endowed with a sweet tooth that finds them attracted to everything from pies cooling on the porch railing to yesterday's trash left out at the curb.

For such offenses it is not uncommon to see bears killed. But isn't there a better way?

The short answer to this is “yes,” and a slightly longer one would be “absolutely.” The really long-winded version reads: We have to teach bears how to live with us at the same time that we learn how to live with them. For our part, we can't be cavalier about managing trash when bears are around. Even bird feeders can lure a passing bear into a yard and in range of potential conflicts.

There are two keys to learning how to live with bears. Don't put temptation in their way, and teach them that humans are to

be avoided. And this is in fact what many communities in bear-rich areas have already begun to do.

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