

Dry conditions could be problematic for bears, other wildlife

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

From bears breaking into Lake Tahoe homes to possible disease outbreaks and other problems, Nevada wildlife officials are waiting to see how this year's dry conditions impact animals.

Significant snowfall in March has eased concerns – at least to some degree – that a lack of berries and other backcountry forage will send black bears marauding through neighborhoods at Tahoe and other bear-prone areas.

“I'm a lot more optimistic than I was two months ago,” said Carl Lackey, bear biologist for the Nevada Department of Wildlife. “It's kind of wait and see. Up until the beginning of March I was really worried.”

March snowfall will hopefully nourish berry bushes sufficiently that a lack of natural food won't drive bears into communities to raid trash containers and search for other human food sources, Lackey said.

That's what happened during the summer of 2007, “by far” the worst on record for bear problems at Tahoe and along the Carson Range, Lackey said.

That year the Department of Wildlife recorded more than 1,500 bear complaints, with drought-related bear problems also experienced in California, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Idaho.

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