

Weather, killing of problem bears cited for drop in conflicts

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Problems with nuisance bears dropped dramatically in 2011, a fact attributed by a state biologist to favorable climatic conditions and the fact a record number of problem-causing bears were killed the year before.

Only 130 bear complaints were received by the Nevada Department of Wildlife last year, down from 440 in 2010 for a 70 percent decrease, according to an annual report prepared by bear biologist Carl Lackey.

The primary reason for the decline, Lackey said, was an epic winter in 2010-2011 that produced a bountiful snowpack, with a significant amount of snowfall coming during the spring. Resulting moisture nourished healthy crops of vegetation that serve as natural food for black bears, including berries, pine nuts, forbs and grasses. Insects and mammals bears sometimes eat are also present in greater numbers during wet years.

“Conditions were just really good,” Lackey said. “Bears didn’t have to come down into urban areas.”

During drought years, things can be profoundly different. During the record year for bear problems of 2007 when natural foods in the backcountry were all but non-existent, bears wandered into neighborhoods in search of food in huge numbers, raiding trash bins and breaking into homes. The Nevada Department of Wildlife received a record 1,500 complaints over nuisance bears.

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