

Mountain lion released near Spooner Summit

By Martin Griffith, AP

A mountain lion that was caught after trying to enter a Reno casino is back in the wild.

The 2-year-old male cougar was released into the Carson Range above Lake Tahoe's East Shore on Saturday morning, said Chris Healy, spokesman for the Nevada Department of Wildlife.

"He was fully ready to go," Healy said. "He was feisty in the trap and snarled if you got too close. Once he decided to go, he quickly ran off into the underbrush and was gone."

Guests at Harrah's reported seeing the 100-pound cat trying to walk into the casino around dawn Friday morning. When the animal couldn't negotiate the revolving door, it hid under an outdoor stage where it was tranquilized and captured.

Wildlife officials speculate the cougar was chased out of the nearby Sierra Nevada foothills by the drought or by an adult cat that didn't want competition for a mate. They believe the cat followed the Truckee River into Reno.

Mountain lion sightings have been reported around Reno in the past, Healy said, but not in the downtown casino area.

Wildlife biologists say the Carson Range is good mountain lion habitat that features an abundance of mule deer and smaller prey in the summer.

"The mountain lion is unlikely to stay in any area until it finds an area of its own," Healy said.

The cougar was fitted with a collar that will track its movements, and officials hope it stays in the wild.

“The best-case scenario is we never see it or hear from it again,” Healy said, adding the cat probably would be euthanized if it turns up in a city again.

The mountain lion was released a couple miles south of Highway 50 in the Spooner Summit area.