

# Man accused of killing mama bear goes to court

By Los Angeles Times

A Northern California man is facing charges for allegedly shooting a mother bear whose cubs he later tried to sell at a gas station last summer, authorities say.

Chris Puett said he shot the mother of the two bears, a brother and sister, who are now sleeping through their first winter at Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care.

"I was defending my life. I don't feel that there should be penalties for defending my life," Puett said in a TV interview.

While there are strict rules against poaching bears, and killing a bear with cubs, those rules don't apply when the bear is charging or threatening a human life, and that's what Puett claims happened.

Back when he shot the mother last summer, he said he killed her. And he collected her cubs in a cage, he said, until he could find someone to take the place of their mother.

He was found last June trying to sell the two baby black bears at a gas station in North San Juan, 75 miles northeast of Sacramento, telling California Department of Fish and Game wardens he was "just trying to find them a good home."

The reason, he said, was because he had shot and killed their mother on his property a few days before.

"He told us he had shot the mother bear in self-defense and the mother bear ran off, leaving the cubs behind," department spokesman Patrick Foy said at the time.

Puett said in an interview this week with KTXL-TV in Sacramento that the cub's mother was after some dog food when the two came face-to-face. But now he's saying he didn't kill her. He says he aimed the gun to the side when he fired so he only injured her.

The Department of Fish and Game isn't buying it, Puett said.

"They think my whole story is a bunch of bear poo," he said.

Even though no one's ever found the mother bear's body, Puett says he's facing some pretty stiff penalties for what he did that day. He goes to court Wednesday in Nevada County to face the bear-killing charges.

"I do not want to forfeit my gun. I do not want to take a hunter safety course, because I wasn't hunting. And the fine is a fine," he said.

Wildlife officials say the two bears will be transferred within the next month, while they are in hibernation, to a den in the wild in or around the Tahoe National Forest.