

Opinion: Bears waking from winter slumber

By Carl Lackey

Mid-March is the time for black bears to emerge from their dens and begin their annual search for food. The first bears to emerge are usually males and females who do not have cubs.

Females with cubs usually emerge from the den later in the spring, from mid-April to early May.

The bears are ready to eat as they emerge from their long winter's nap. They will eat emergent grasses and forbs and will also key in on the carrion of dead and decaying animals that died over the winter period.

Bears in the Lake Tahoe Basin will also be looking toward human garbage as a source of food.

Every year, the first bears to get into trouble are the young males, many of whom are generational garbage bears. These bears are born to females who have taught them that humans are a source of food.

The old warnings from past years are still valid. If you live in bear country, do not allow bears access to garbage. Keep garage doors shut, car doors locked and keep all food sources away from bears.

Another potential problem is people deliberately feeding the bears by placing bird seed, vegetables or other plant matter out in places near their homes. Nevada has a law against feeding big game animals and last year, a person in Incline Village was warned for deliberately feeding the bears.

We had to humanely euthanize a bear last year that was being deliberately fed by humans. The bear had become a threat to

public safety. The bear's behavior was disturbing because it had no fear of humans. The person or persons feeding the bear, through their actions, acclimated it to humans as a source of food and the bear ended up paying the ultimate price for their actions.

Since March 1, NDOW has captured three bears, all young males. An injured bear at Heavenly Mountain Resort was captured and turned over to California authorities for care. On March 7, another injured bear in Incline Village was captured. The nature of the bear's injuries were not obvious, but the bear had to be euthanized. A third male bear was caught on the west side of Carson City over the weekend while raiding garbage cans. It was tranquilized and later released in the mountains south of Carson City.

Because of the ongoing drought conditions, we are expecting a very busy nuisance bear year. People in bear country need to be ready to do all they can to keep the bears wild and away from human sources of food.

Anyone wishing to report illegal activity can call the Operation Game Thief Hotline at 800.992.3030. The OGT Hotline is a place where persons concerned about the illegal feeding of bears can provide information to NDOW game wardens anonymously.

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