

# Drought taking toll on Nev. wildlife

By AP

RENO – Lingering drought is taking a toll on wildlife across Northern Nevada, shrinking deer herds on the high desert, drying up fisheries in the valleys and starting to push everything from bears to snakes into urban neighborhoods they normally don't frequent.

Mule deer especially are showing signs of stress, and some fisheries may be lost altogether by the end of the summer as a result of a third consecutive year of serious drought, state wildlife officials say.

"It's stressing the animals, and it's stressing the habitat itself," David Catalano, a supervisory biologist with the Nevada Department of Wildlife, told the *Reno Gazette-Journal*.

Snowpack was low after a dismal winter, leading streams and creeks that normally flow into July or later to go dry in March or April, Catalano said. That's causing small animals like rabbits and squirrels to flock to neighborhoods where water, grass and insects are plentiful.

"They've got a mini-ecosystem that is flourishing, so all these little critters are drawn there," Catalano said. "Now they are all competing a lot more for shelter and for foraging."

The rodents in turn attract predators. Catalano said calls regarding snakes on people's property in the Reno-Sparks area have increased significantly since the drought began.

At Lake Tahoe and across the Carson Range, hungry bears are on the move because they can't find the berries and other natural

food sources they normally depend on.

Meanwhile, since 2012, Nevada's mule deer herd has declined from an estimated 112,000 animals to about 108,000 this year, said Cody Schroeder, the department's specialist on the animal.

The grasses and flowering plants mule deer eat in the summer are increasingly scarce, as well as the sagebrush and bitterbrush they consume in winter. As a result, the deer are slowly wasting, and the youngest are most at risk, Schroeder said.

Fish are in trouble, too.

Kim Tisdale, Nevada's supervisory fisheries biologist, said the Carson and Walker rivers could go dry.

"We could lose those fisheries," Tisdale said. "It's a possibility. We're hoping not."

They lack the same upstream storage of the Truckee River, which likely will have enough water to protect fish there, Tisdale said.

But Lahontan and Rye Patch reservoirs are down significantly. Very hot weather this summer could kill off fish by robbing those fisheries of dissolved oxygen, Tisdale said.

Wildhorse and Willow Creek reservoirs in Elko County are facing serious risks of a die-off. The state lifted catch limits in the two lakes in mid-May to try to empty them of fish before conditions become uninhabitable.