

# Bears homing in on fruit trees

By Chris Healy

Fruit trees throughout western Nevada blossom in the spring and will produce ripened fruit in mid-summer. As the fruit develops, the black bears in western Nevada are sure to take notice.

Armed with a sense of smell that is 2,100 times better than a human's, black bears can tell when it is time to venture down the hill into places like west Reno, Washoe and Pleasant Valleys, Carson City and the western edges of the Carson Valley (Minden, Gardnerville and Genoa).

"Fruit trees are a major attraction for Nevada's black bears," says Nevada Department of Wildlife biologist Carl Lackey. "During this time of year and especially during this drought, fruit is on their radar."

Since it is a bear's overwhelming instinct to eat and the human's responsibility to not attract the bears, people who own fruit trees need to harvest their fruit as quickly as possible and not allow it to become an attraction for the bears.

"We have had many cases over the years where people allow their fruit to ripen and fall to the ground and then bears become a nuisance in their yard and the surrounding neighborhoods," adds Lackey. "If you own fruit trees and you do not want bears to eat your fruit, then you need to act quickly in harvesting the fruit from the trees. People who leave the fruit on the trees stand a good chance of the bears damaging the trees while they climb them in search of a meal."

The pace of bear activity and the sightings of those bears

along the edges of western Nevada's cities are only going to increase as summer rolls toward fall.

We are not trying to create panic by advising people of these potential bear encounters. We are trying to create tolerance amongst people living in these urban interface areas. They need to be bear aware and do what they can to keep bears alive and wild. Part of that responsibility means managing fruit crops and the weekly trash better.

The bears are nocturnal and a bunch of trash cans left out overnight is a strong attractant and way too easy a meal for the bears. Add the attraction of ripened fruit and you can almost guarantee a visit from a bear in your neighborhood.

Since July 1, NDOW has handled 19 bears in western Nevada. Fourteen of those bears have been safely released back in to the wild. Three of the bears were hit and killed by cars, one was euthanized for public safety reasons and one was euthanized for depredating upon livestock.

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