

Wildlife-vehicle collisions near Tahoe increasing

Caltrans and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife are cautioning motorists of an unusually high number of collisions between drivers and wildlife on Interstate 80 and Highway 50 in Placer and El Dorado counties.

“There were an unprecedented 23 incidents involving large animals on Highway 50 and I-80 in just six days from Nov. 14-19,” Caltrans Director Malcolm Dougherty said in a statement. “Drivers need to use caution and watch out for wildlife as they travel through the Sierras and other rural areas.”

Here are a few tips for motorists:

- Be particularly alert when driving in areas frequented by wildlife and give yourself more time than usual to react safely by reducing your speed.
- “Sweep” the roadway from side to side with your eyes as you drive. This increases your chance of seeing anything that might become a hazard.
- Pay particular attention when driving during morning and evening, as wildlife are most active during these times.
- If you see an animal cross the road, know that another may be following it.
- Don’t litter. Odors from all kinds of products may entice animals to venture near roadways.

Officials say there are probably several factors behind the animals’ increased movements near highways. One is the deer rut, or mating season, and bucks are always more active this time of year. Recent wildfires in the mountains and foothills also destroyed a considerable amount of vegetation, forcing wildlife to travel farther than usual to forage. The drought

has stressed existing vegetation, likely reducing its normal nutritional value and forcing animals to eat more than usual. Bears are getting ready for hibernation and are foraging far and wide to get enough nutrition to make it through the winter.