

Garbage bears staying awake during winter

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

That Christmas visitor to Troy Brown's place wasn't Santa, it was a bear.

And that bear captured by wildlife officials in South Reno, like another in the same spot six days before, was demonstrating behavior noted by wildlife experts for more than a decade now – at a time of year when the animals are usually lying down for a winter's nap, many remain awake and on the prowl in search of food.

For the black bears of western Nevada, hibernation has become optional.

"You can keep bears up during the winter if you feed them," said Jon Beckmann, a biologist and bear expert with the Wildlife Conservation Society.

And feeding them we are, primarily with garbage.

That same human-provided food source that has led to mounting conflict between people and bears across the Reno-Tahoe area is not only making bears bigger, it's also altering fundamental aspects of their behavior.

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