

Opinion: Senseless killing of Tahoe bear



Someone on the South Shore killed this bear last week.
Photos/Toogee Sielsch

By Toogee Sielsch

On July 9, a family living on Minniconjou Drive in a neighborhood off Pioneer Trail in South Lake Tahoe had the pleasure of enjoying seeing one of our furry forest denizens cruising through their neighborhood. These are the kind of folks who feel getting a view from a safe distance of one of the black bears that live in the basin is a true gift to be cherished.

Later that evening they remember hearing what they described as a single large firework explosion or maybe a gunshot.

I can't even imagine what went through their minds when the next day, Friday, while taking a walk on a trail through the forest-meadow interface below their neighborhood. They found the lifeless body of the untagged, beautiful, healthy, and muscular 2 1/2-year-old black bear they had seen alive and

well the day before. They immediately returned home and made a call to Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care.

Apparently one of their neighbors from Minniconjou Drive, or one the nearby streets like Jicarilla Drive, didn't quite feel the same way about the bears living in the basin that this family and many of the rest of us that live here in the Tahoe basin feel.



Sunglasses give perspective of how big this bear was.

At 5:40pm July 10, I received a call from LTWC asking if I could go take a look at a possible dead bear. My youngest son, Ian, and I met the family at the end of Minniconjou Drive. They showed us where the carcass was. As we approached the dead bear, I was struck by his body position. He was on his back, head rolled to one side, and tongue out and bitten through at the base of two trees.

I took pics on the approach and from other angles before I moved in and did a field examination on the body, looking for any wounds or signs of trauma. I was baffled by the lack of

blood at the scene. On the bear's backside I found multiple small puncture wounds. I must admit that my first impression is that this could possibly be an accident and the bear received those puncture wounds falling out of a tree. But I also know that the first thing a black bear learns when its mother takes it out of the den for the first time is how to climb a tree and stay up it in danger. And there weren't any freshly broken branches around the body, which would be scattered if it had hit and was injured by branches in the fall.

My second impression was that the puncture wounds were buckshot wounds and the bear was shot while climbing up the tree and let it's grip go and fell to its death.

Ian and I dragged the 200- to 225-pound, 2 1/2 year old bear uphill as it was getting dark and not wanting to leave the carcass to the other wild animals in the area and thereby destroying any evidence.

On Saturday, California Fish and Wildlife Game Warden Darrell Stevenson was called to examine the body at LTWC and confirmed the wounds as being from large buckshot from a shotgun. At 2:30pm on Saturday, I walked Stevenson through the site where the bear was found dead. He had spent much of the morning going door-to-door on Minniconjou Drive and adjacent streets interviewing folks for any information.

Above are the facts, and now on to the opinion section of this piece: What kind of inferior life form feels that for nothing more than knocking over a few trash cans, which isn't a bear's fault that they are left out, a bear deserves a death penalty? Not to mention some wingnut is shooting off a firearm in an inhabited neighborhood here in our town? Some folks like to frame we animal activists as crazy, but this horrendous action defies crazy, and tips into the realm of psychotic. Ann Bryant of the Bear League is setting up a donation fund for the information that leads to an arrest and conviction of the

scumbag who did this heartless deed. Anyone having any information about this crime may call the Bear League at 530.525.7297.

This crime might very well go unpunished, but please, let's not let it go unnoticed.

Toogee Sielsch is a resident of South Lake Tahoe.