

'Pioneering' bears push east into Nevada

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

A black bear recently captured by wildlife officials near the Oregon border may be the latest example of a bear making its home in historic Nevada range last occupied by the animals close to a century ago.

After receiving increasing reports of bear sightings, tracks and scat on a ranch in a remote part of northern Washoe County near Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge, biologists with the Nevada Department of Wildlife set a trap in hope of catching a bear for research purposes.

On July 25 the trap was sprung and scientists had their hands on an adult male black bear, maybe seven or eight years old and "in very good shape" for a wild bear, said Carl Lackey, bear biologist for the Department of Wildlife. The bear was tranquilized and weighed, tagged, tattooed and fixed with a microchip. Hair and blood samples were taken for DNA.

By the second decade of the 1900s, black bears were completely gone from Nevada's interior and likely rare in the state's western fringes, researchers said. But forests clear-cut for mining regenerated in subsequent decades, improving bear habitat and boosting the bear population in western Nevada.

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