

USFS won't tolerate people-wildlife interaction



People in search of bears eating Kokanee at Taylor Creek are being warned to behave. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

CAMP RICHARDSON – Fish, bears and people are such a potentially deadly situation that the U.S. Forest Service is taking pre-emptive measures to ensure there is no conflict at Taylor Creek.

This is the time of year when the Kokanee salmon spawn at Lake Tahoe – though they are a tad late this year.

Signs are up on a rope that prohibits people from walking all the way along the rocky shore of the creek. This is because last year the conflicts between people and wildlife were getting out of hand and the feds don't want a repeat or worse.

“Last year there were a lot of really close calls,” Lindsay

Gusses with the USFS told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Bears will be the losers.”

People were walking into the water. They got close to bears. It was all about getting the perfect selfie.

Gusses called it a “blatant disregard” for wildlife. People seemed to have zero concept of what a 200-pound bear is capable of. And if a bear were to go after a person, while the person might survive, that bear will be caught and killed all because a person acted irresponsibly.

The Forest Service has the ability to completely close off the site if people get too out of line. For now, the directive is to stay on designated trails. The agency has people regularly patrolling the area to ensure visitors (which includes locals) are educated about why they need to keep a safe distance and then to make sure they do so.



Kokanee are slow this year to spawn in Taylor Creek.

Still, there are plenty of viewing areas. On Friday the most salmon could be seen from the bridge along the Rainbow Trail.

Bears eating the Kokanee are a relatively new phenomena in Tahoe. It’s a learned behavior for them, according to Gusses. “They learned it because these fish are not native and bears

are opportunistic.”

Plus, she added, it’s a lot of work to catch a live fish that only has 2 pounds of meat on it.

Estimates are that between 200 and 300 bears call the basin home. The Taylor Creek area has seen seven of them.

“If this were a known reliable food source, we’d have all 300 here,” Gusses said.

Two weeks ago water was released from Fallen Leaf Lake, thus ensuring there would be plenty of water for the fish to swim in. There is even more water this year than last because the summer rains filled Fallen Leaf, which in turn meant more could be released this fall.

The drought may be contributing to the late spawn. Kokanee like cold water for this migration. The shallow waters of Tahoe where they enter Taylor Creek are warm.

Other wildlife are ready for their arrival. Mallards are about – waiting to eat the eggs; mergansers want the live fish.

Last year salmon were seen in the Tahoe Keys. This year there are reports of them in the Upper Truckee River and Incline Creek. The fish return to where they were born, so it’s possible Taylor Creek will no longer be the only place they regularly spawn.

Even so, this South Shore waterway will always remain the primary place to spawn as long as the California Department of Fish and Wildlife keeps stocking the lake with Kokanee. Each year the state officials gather a half million Kokanee eggs from Taylor Creek, then raise them in Folsom, and return them to the creek in April.