

LTWC cubs set for release in spring

By Tom Millham

Late August into early September 2017, Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care had two bear cubs die suddenly over the space of two weeks; a shock to the entire organization.

LTWC's veterinarian, Kevin Willitts, worked with Brandon Munk of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to determine the cause of these bears' deaths.

After extensive work by Munk and his team, alongside various other agencies, it was determined that a virus called canine adenovirus was responsible for the cubs' deaths.

Through additional testing, the remaining four cubs being cared for at LTWC's facility have proved to be positive for the virus. Initial concerns included the source of this virus so LTWC took immediate measures to quarantine the remaining cubs, in addition to the rest of the rehabilitation compound.

The four remaining cubs continued to show excellent health and are expected to remain healthy. They entered into their hibernation period – in early December – and have been seen nestling in the straw inside their den.

The loss of these two bear cubs stimulated additional investigation by Munk and pathologists at the California Animal Health and Food Safety laboratory. Their work has shown that other black bears in California have been exposed to canine adenovirus. Their investigations are ongoing and the significance of these findings is yet to be known.

The two cubs (Burns Canyon and Laytonville) are expected to be

released sometime in late March/early April, while the two cubs from the Tahoe area (Sky and Bliss) are scheduled to be released in late April/early May.

Tom Millham is the co-founder of Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care.