



Black bears around Lake Tahoe are preparing to wake from their winter slumbers.

The bears are back

Lake Tahoe black bears

The last time we reported on black bears around the Lake Tahoe region, it was in the fall when they were entering a state called “hyperphagia”—and eating everything they could get their paws on in preparation for hibernating through the winter (“Bear in mind,” RN&R, Tahoe, Aug. 30, 2018).

“For now, most of our collared bears are still denning,” said Ashley Sanchez, public information officer for the Nevada Division of Wildlife. “We haven’t seen a whole lot of activity yet—but, you know, it is getting warmer out, so some of them are starting to stick their heads out of their dens.”

When the bears wake, Sanchez said biologists expect they’ll head for lower elevations where more food sources will have begun to grow. But they will pass through—and may hang around—urban areas. And there are standard precautions agencies like NDOW want Tahoe region residents and visitors to observe.

“We’re pretty much just asking people to take the precautions we ask them to take, really, all year long, which is securing their trash,” Sanchez said. “They can do that by getting a bear-resistant garbage container or keeping their trash in a locked shed or garage until the morning of trash pick up.”

NDOW also recommends securing food sources other than trash.

“There’s also the option of an electric fencing, which is a great way to deter bears,” she said. “It gives them enough of a shock that they don’t want to come back.”

Electric fencing can be installed around everything from chicken coops to gardens, but a person would want to look into it with

haste. The bears will soon wake from their winter slumbers—but how soon?

“I mean, right about now,” Sanchez said. “So, now into the next few weeks, but it’s been pretty quiet so far.”

On the California side of the lake, biologists also expect bears to wake and head for lower elevations in the coming weeks.

According to Lesa Johnston, education and outreach coordinator for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, “That’s typically the drill—what happens in general when the bears are starting to emerge in the warmer temps. ... That’s what we expect; however, we have had some unusual bear activity during the winter.”

Johnston said California biologists have seen a trend where “bears that, historically, were not active are active in the winter.”

“One of our Forest Service biologists from the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit was saying that they had some bears that were apparently active all winter,” Johnston said. “She doesn’t have the data to know exactly how many, but, personally, she said she saw bears all winter.”

In the Tahoe Keys, another biologist reported that a mother bear and her two cubs have breaking into vehicles and garages and getting underneath houses.

“Cabin break ins, break ins of residences are expected,” Johnston said. “It happens every spring. Bears will start just trying to eat anything they can get their paws on.”

In addition to precautions like securing trash and locking doors, Johnston said her agency would like people to be aware of increased wildlife activity in general.

“Take it into consideration that animals are waking up and there’s lots more activity ... so be mindful when you’re in these areas of bears crossing the road, deer crossing the road. And bears will be hungry, looking for food.” □

Learn more about living with black bears here: bit.ly/2MXa6IU.

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