

# Baby bears find refuge in suburbia

## Garden City woman prepares orphans to survive in the wild

By Emily Simnitt  
The Idaho Statesman

GARDEN CITY — Sally Maughan is nurturing orphaned baby bears in suburbia.

Maughan started Idaho Black Bear Rehab Inc. 12 years ago on what was then a quiet, 2 1/2-acre Garden City spot surrounded by pastures. Now, a few feet from a cage housing seven bears, the din of construction drones out the bears' grunts as they vie for apples scattered on the cage floor.

Behind that cage, a new enclosure for baby bears ready for hibernation stands side-by-side a line of houses, separated from the property only by a short fence.

But Maughan said that although she's scouted out other locations, she's in Garden City to stay. She likes it here, and so far, has had only positive response from neighbors.

"I'm just too old to move," Maughan said.

The November afternoon sun still beats off the morning chill, but winter — and bear hibernation — is well on its way. For now, Maughan feeds the bears apples by the bushel. The bears need enough weight to survive hibernating until April and the succeeding months as they become practiced hunters and foragers.

Already, the bears, which are about 11 months old, are sluggish. Maughan takes in bears starting in March, when they are puppy-sized and must be bottle-fed. After that, the bear cubs arrive in stages ranging from what Maughan calls the "terrible twos" to almost independent.

Once Maughan turns off the food supply, the cubs will burrow into dog-kennels-turned-dens and sleep until the December date when Maughan, and Idaho Department of Fish and Game officials take them to real and



Darin Oswald / The Idaho Statesman

**Taz, a determined black bear orphan,** pushes his head as far as possible through a window in a fence at Idaho Black Bear Rehab Inc. in Boise. The operation takes in orphaned bears, getting them healthy and ready to fer for themselves in the wild.

artificial dens in Central Idaho, Utah or Oregon, depending on where the bears came from. From there on out, the bears are on their own.

When Maughan began rehabbing the bears, she already had more than 10 years' wildlife rehabbing experience. Twenty-three years ago, the Treasure Valley native found an injured squirrel in her yard.

That was the first of Maughan's success stories.

To date, Maughan has successfully rehabbed 43 bears, and she's got at least 19 this year to add to the total. Most years, she's had six or seven, but with a bad fire and drought season, food was scarce. Many mother bears died of hunger or abandoned cubs they could no longer take care of.

Maughan said she's not about to turn any bear away — especially be-

cause she's only one of nine people rehabbing bears in the United States.

At the heart of the problem is a long held fear that rehabbed bears will become too used to humans. Maughan said that simply isn't true. Only one of the bears she's rehabbed turned into a problem bear, and with that, she said, there were extenuating circumstances.

Maughan has never been hurt by a cub, even though by November, her March babies weigh more than 100 pounds.

"They see me as another bear," she said.

Maughan receives significant financial support from abroad to help with the \$800-per-bear cost of rehab. The World Society for the Protection of Animals, based in London, has helped foot the food bill for the last

few years and donated the funds for the new enclosure.

Maughan has plenty of national publicity as well. The New York Times and "Good Morning America" have both trekked to Maughan's Garden City location to see the bears and tell people why Maughan has started such an unusual program.

But Maughan is modest.

"When I started, I couldn't figure out why no one was doing bears," she said. "Zoos and wildlife refuges don't want them. If you don't rehab, death is your option."

"It's really the relationship I have with the bears. They have a wonderful spirit. I was probably a bear in a previous life."

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