

Idaho woman takes in orphans

By RAY GRASS
OF THE DESERET MORNING NEWS

SALT LAKE CITY — The story started with three bears — three very little bears. It ended a few weeks back, game officers believe, when three much larger bears were released back into the mountains of Utah to begin foraging for berries, digging for worms and, hopefully, avoiding humans.

The three black bears were orphaned as cubs, found last summer and put under the care of Sally Maughan, who raised them to the age of release.

Maughan, or "Mama Bear" to many of the young cubs she has cared for, lives outside of Boise and runs the Black Bear Rehabilitation Center.

It was to this Idaho center the three Teddy-bear-like cubs from Utah were sent.

Unfortunately, not all orphaned cubs are lucky enough to find their way to Idaho. Not all orphaned cubs survive long enough to be found. And, even if they were, there's not room or money enough at this time to care for all of them.

Maughan started caring for cubs 15 years ago, she recalled in a telephone interview this week, paying for all expenses with her own money. Eventually, demands were higher than her income and she faced closing the center. An animal-care group stepped up and offered help, enough to keep the center open. Still, she said with a sigh, she survives on donations and what extra money she can provide from her pocket. It can cost as much as \$800 or \$900 to raise a young cub to an age where it can survive on its own.

In this case, one cub was caught in an illegal snare trap, a second was orphaned when its mother was illegally killed during hunting season, and the third was left alone when a vehicle killed its mother.

Usually, Maughan gets the cubs in the summer and raises them until December. At this point they are taken into the mountains and placed in dens to hibernate and begin life on their own.

When found, the Utah cubs weighed 9, 15 and 30 pounds. When released, the two smaller bears weighed around 105 pounds and the larger one around 120 pounds.

In the case of the three Utah cubs, Maughan felt they were too small to survive hibernation, so she cared for them over



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ABOVE: The smallest of the three rescued black bear cubs plays on the lawn at the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources Central Region office in Springville, Utah, before being transferred to the Idaho Black Bear Rehabilitation Center in Boise. **BELOW:** A bear cub waits in a Division of Wildlife Resources holding facility before being released into the Manti-La Sal National Forest. Sally Maughan, also known as 'Mama Bear' to many of the young cubs she has cared for, lives outside of Boise and runs the Black Bear Rehabilitation Center.

the winter and returned them to the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources in June. Two officers took the three into the Manti-LaSal National Forest and, quietly and unceremoniously, opened their cages and watched as they set off into their new surroundings.

After their stay in Idaho, the young bears "should have the skills necessary to survive in the wild," said Dave Hintze, one of the two DWR biologists involved in the release.

Maughan concurred, even though there was involved contact with humans and a greater concern over the association between humans and food.

"I try to bottle feed when necessary," she said, explaining the rearing process. "Yes, there's a bond there. They see me as their mom. If they come to me when they're weaned, then it's a different relationship. They don't know what I am. They see me as a bear as long as I've got other cubs around me. They treat me as a bear, but they're not real social. Sometimes it's just a nose to the back of the hand. Most of the time they just stay away."

Experience has shown that the bears see the enclosures in Idaho as a safe area, "like areas around mom when she's napping under a tree."

Once out of the enclosures, instincts take over and their life in the wild begins. They



are quick to climb trees when threatened and are wary of humans.

The greatest fear is that the young bears, now comfortable with human contact, will become nuisance bears or bears that are not afraid to raid cabins or ice boxes or forage through garbage cans in a search for food. Occasionally, such bears have to be destroyed.

Of the 89 bears raised and released from Maughan's center, only two became nuisances. And in both cases, she said, both bears had extreme personalities, meaning both were very difficult to handle from the onset.

"I believe if the bears have a few days or a week away from

people, they'll quickly revert to their natural ways," she said.

In the compounds, the young bears are fed dog food, fruits and vegetables, branches from a willow tree and, on occasion, frozen yogurt.

When released, continued Maughan, "We've done studies that show they have no trouble adapting to available foods, such as berries, worms, ants and an occasional field mouse."

Last year, Maughan raised six bear cubs to their release age. As yet, whether because of the drought or fires, she has not received any new occupants, but it's certain she will.

And, hopefully, their stories will end as well as the three bears from Utah.