

# Deseret News

## Bearing up well: 14 rescued cubs freed in Utah's wilds

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Fourteen bear cubs, sent off to school in Idaho last year, returned home to Utah Thursday bigger, wiser and now — very likely — able to grow up into big bears.

The 14 black bear cubs were, for one reason or another, orphaned last year. After capture, they were sent to the Idaho Black Bear Rehab Center near Boise.

Biologists from the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources retrieved the bears this week, drove them back to Utah and released them in the Book Cliffs area along the eastern portion of Utah early Thursday.

The bears came to the Idaho facility small and underweight, said Sally Maughan, who founded the center in 1989.

"Some were as small as 10 pounds when they should have been 35 or 40 pounds. They were starving. When they left," she explained, "they were fat and healthy. I'll bet some weighed upwards of 150 pounds. The average bear this age would be around 120 pounds.

"Some people complain that I feed the bears too much, but how do you stop feeding a young bear?"

When orphaned bears are found, wildlife officials have four options:

- Find a zoo to take the cubs.
- Humanely euthanize the cubs.
- Return the cubs to the wild, in which case they most certainly will die.
- Ship the cubs off to Idaho to be reared and — when a year old and able to take care of themselves — sent home and released.

Over the years, Maughan said, she has raised 89 bears brought to her from six Western states. All were released back into the wild. Only two of those bears, she added, became problem bears that had to be euthanized.

For some unexplainable reason, she added, there was an exceptionally high number of cubs — 41 — at her Idaho facility this year. The previous high was 23.

When possible, said Bill Bates, wildlife biologist with the DWR, abandoned cubs are sent to Idaho.

"We started this in 2000. The first year we sent three cubs. Each year we've sent a few. Until this year, the most we've sent is four," he said.

In some cases last year, sows were killed and their cubs orphaned. In other cases, mother bears simply abandoned the cubs because of a shortage of food.

"We had a wet spring, but then it dried up and there were no berries. Sows had cubs but no food, so they kicked them out," he said.

Abandoned cubs, in a search for food and starving, showed up in camping areas and in towns, where they were captured.

