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## Wild returns spell success for bear rehab

An orphaned bear cub, found by an officer of the Department of Fish & Wildlife in Washington state, USA, and transported nearly 430 miles to the WSPA-funded [Idaho Black Bear Rehabilitation \(IBBR\)](#) centre, is a welcome sign that its tried and tested bear rehabilitation techniques are achieving widespread recognition.



In the past the young bear, now named Wasaka – meaning strong in the Native American Dakota language – would have been euthanized by wildlife officers. Its chances of survival and successful rehabilitation would have been seen as slim.

However, Rich Beausoleil, the officer who found Wasaka, knew of IBBR's reputation and contacted founder Sally Maughan for help despite the distances involved.

### Welcome recognition

"It was great to get the call from Rich," explains Sally. "When I first started in 1989, wildlife agencies believed that an orphaned cub raised by a human would either starve to death or become a problem bear if released. Then, as now, it was difficult to find a zoo or wildlife park that would take these orphaned cubs. The only other options available were to humanely euthanize the cub or leave it in the wild in the hopes it would survive."

Undaunted by her early critics, Sally has since returned more than 180 bears to the wild and wildlife officers like Rich and others from as far away as California are now approaching her for help with orphaned cubs.

"When wildlife agencies encounter orphaned bear cubs our options can be limited with what we can do, mostly because of shrinking budgets and lack of staffing. But Sally Maughan and the folks at IBBR help fill the void – offering us rehabilitation and release options that we didn't have

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before,” says Rich.

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“As an agency biologist, I’m glad IBBR is here to help and I hope they continue to be there for us, and the bears, in the future.”

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When orphaned cubs like Wasaka arrive at IBBR they are often weak, wounded, and starving. Injury from cars and hunters, drought, forest fires and starvation from lack of food are just a few of the problems that can affect them.

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Emergency medical attention and months of dedication are usually needed to get them back on their way to the wild.

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The cubs are slowly prepared for their journeys back to freedom and gradually develop the skills of foraging for food and protecting themselves that they would have acquired in the wild. Most cubs are released when they are between 11 to 17 months old.

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### International action

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“WSPA has supported IBBR’s work for more than 10 years as part of our international bear cub rehabilitation programme. Sally’s success has provided us with an excellent model of how effective bear cub rehabilitation programmes can be,” explains Neil D’Cruze WSPA’s wildlife programmes officer.

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“We are currently working with numerous rehabilitation groups around the world, [sharing good practice and training](#), and are delighted to show IBBR as a shining example.”

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