Sally Maughan doesn't leave her 2.5 acres anymore because her foster animals need her undivided, 24-hour-a-day attention. No one can substitute.

Maughan rehabilitates bear cubs so they can return to the wild. It's a delicate process that few in the world are able to do. The trick is that the cubs cannot become comfortable with humans, otherwise they might become problem bears when returned to the wild and wander into camp sites or cabins.

Very few people come close to Maughan's bears. She does all the nurturing. They perceive her as mother bear. The few volunteers she works with run her errands, buy food for her and the bears and help maintain the bear enclosures.

"Everyone wants to see the bears but that defeats the purpose," said volunteer Belinda Isley, who coordinates outreach efforts. "It's amazing what she is able to do."

Maughan lives in a double-wide trailer with her 92-year-old mother, two dogs and numerous cats. Three coyotes live steps away.

The porch has two cages for the youngest cubs, who need to be fed formula every three hours. She has seven larger cages to isolate cubs who may be injured or hibernating and one huge cage — as big as a basketball court — where cubs can interact, climb on stumps and swim in a wading pool.

Maughan's complex used to be isolated west of Boise. Now she sits in the middle of clusters of new subdivisions about hundred yards off west State Street.

"I'd make a good hermit out in the woods, but here I am," she said. "A responsible adult has to be with the bears at all times."

Maughan learned bear behaviors through trial and error, reading books and years of watching and interacting with them. She began rehabilitating raccoons and squirrels 23 years ago. Someone brought in an abandoned bear cub, and Maughan took it only because she had a big enough cage.

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Napili, a 12-week-old orphaned black bear cub, plays with her new mom, Sally Maughan. Napili was close to dying of malnutrition near Olympia, Wash., before Maughan took her in. “She was the sweetest bear,” said Maughan, who has nurtured more than 130 cubs. “She never got mad or destroyed anything. She was very special to me.”

Maughan becomes attached to all her cubs but she’s realistic about their future. She was born in Idaho and raised at Redfish Lake, where her parents owned the lodge and hunted and fished regularly.

“I respect hunting as long as they do it ethically and morally ... and don’t shoot one of my bears,” she said with a smile.

Experts are mixed on whether cubs can be rehabilitated by humans and then released back into the wild without becoming a problem for people. But Maughan is confident that she has been successful because she hears very little about her bears, some of which have radio collars and most of which have ear tags.

“I heard a 6-year-old was shot hunting and six or so have been hit by cars,” Maughan said. “But only two have come in contact with people.”

Maughan’s brain is full of valuable information about the antics and habits of bears. She has very little documented, which is why she wants to raise enough money to buy a monitoring system. Cameras would record the bears at all times and the information could be used for research or in classrooms.

“It takes three hours for a bear to lose interest in me and go about its business and that’s a lot of time for me to spend observing,” Maughan said.

Maughan doesn’t return her bears to the wild if she doesn’t think they will survive. She doesn’t keep them and she doesn’t give them to zoos.

“I would never put one of my bears in captivity,” Maughan said. “I have too much respect for their spirit.”