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Troublesome bear killed at Pinos Altos

By Levi Hill Sun-News bureau chief
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PINOS ALTOS — New Mexico Game and Fish officials shot and killed a problem bear in the Pinos Altos region Tuesday night following attacks of area residents' livestock.

Silver City District Wildlife Officer Jon Armijo said the bear, which had been spotted at several homes along Enchanted Trail for the past week, was shot around 8 p.m. Tuesday evening near a home on Enchanted Trail.

Armijo said live traps set in the region during the past week failed to capture the bear and Game and Fish initially planned to capture the animal and move it to an area of the Gila Wilderness near Snow Lake, but was forced to shoot the bear once it began killing livestock.

"The animal had lost its fear of humans," Armijo said. "It was staring into windows of houses and hanging out on one person's back deck for the past week. Once they start killing animals like that, they pretty much sign their own death warrant."

The bear, a 150 pound cinnamon-colored black bear, finally crossed the line when it killed more than 20 chickens belonging to Pinos Altos resident Betty Graham.

"The first time he came by, he didn't do anything, but the next night, he killed four," Graham said. "Tuesday about daylight, he got into the chicken coop and

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This bear, caught raiding bird feeders and eating home owners'... (Photo courtesy of Mike Moutoux)

slaughtered 17. He didn't eat all of them. He wreaked havoc."

Graham said that in her 70 years living in the area, this is only the second problem bear she's had to deal with. The first time was in 1977 and that bear left the area after scaring a few horses.

Graham said her biggest concern was her miniature horses and goats.

"I am sure he would have kept coming back and I was afraid that when he finished with the chickens, he would move on to

something else," she said. "If he had killed my horses, I'd have been worse than upset."

Armijo said the bear was even spotted climbing out the window of a barn where the horses and goats were kept.

"If it is attacking livestock or damaging their property, they have the right to shoot it," Armijo said of property owners. "If I am called, I have to get approval from my superiors before I can take action."

He said he received authorization from Santa Fe on Tuesday and took an opportunity to shoot the bear near the home of Alan Berkowitz.

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Berkowitz said he'd seen the bear regularly over the past week and it even came up to the home.

"One time he came up to the house and put his nose on the glass door leading onto the deck," Berkowitz said. "He didn't seem to be afraid."

Mike Moutoux also had visits from the bear, who ate bird feed, drank from Moutoux's hot tub and climbed on the porch of Moutoux's home. Moutoux said the bear did seem to have some fear of humans when he saw it.

"We'd seen him outside and I went to take pictures. I decided to take my sandals off to walk across the deck and when I hit the Velcro to take them off, he was off before I was done," Moutoux said.

Moutoux, a former Game and Fish officer in Ohio for 19 years, said he feels Armijo did everything right, but the bear will be missed.

"When we first saw (the bear) we brought in our bird feeders and trash to keep from attracting him," Moutoux said. "I think everything Jon did was spot on, but when we look out our window it is not going to be the same."

Armijo said Game and Fish generally tries to sell animals that are killed and the money is put into the operating budget for the department. He said he has found a buyer for the bear.

"We try to utilize every bit of the animal that we can," he said. "I hate to see it end in that fashion. I was looking forward to releasing it into the wilderness."

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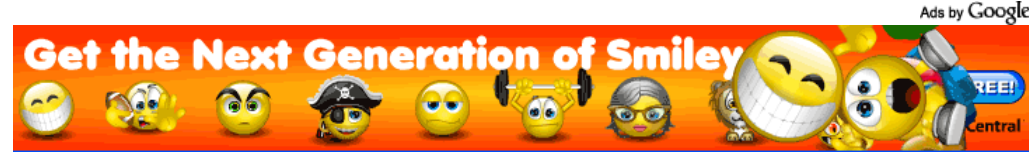
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