

Bear, cubs blamed for attack destroyed

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GATLINBURG - A sow bear and three cubs captured in the area where a 72-year-old woman was attacked by a bear, have been euthanized by Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) officers.

Mitch Clure, the bear control officer for the city, said measurements of bite marks on the woman's body and claw marks on her wooden deck matched perfectly with the teeth and claws of the euthanized bears.

"We can't swear these are the bears, but we attempted to gather as much information and evidence as we can. ... We are hopeful those are the bears that attacked the woman," said Willard Perryman, TWRA law enforcement supervisor.

Perryman said bear traps will remain near the Heiden Drive dump all week in an effort to rule out, based on the measurements, that another bear is not the culprit. Aggressive bears will be moved or euthanized, depending on their behavior and the circumstances.

Meanwhile, at least one Sevier County resident says that not enough is being done to keep bears from getting garbage at the city's Heiden Drive dump, or to discourage people from deliberately feeding bears.

Mark Fields said he recently saw bears climbing in and out of the dumpsters and people gathered around taking pictures, and he has seen food placed on the ground to lure bears.

"The Heiden Drive dump is not secure. There is a gate, but it's not shut. From what I know it's open 24/7. And, there is so much trash on the ground around and inside the fenced area," Fields said.

Perryman agreed the area is a mess, and said, "The city is trying to keep it cleaned up, sending people to pick up trash and shutting the gate at night, but it's obvious and apparent that bears are getting a lot out of those dumpsters. ... The fence is torn up and the bears are brave enough to come in the daytime." He also said the euthanized bears had corn in their scat, indicating someone may be feeding them.

City Manager Cindy Cameron Ogle says the city has shown a commitment to securing the trash. "The (Heiden Drive dump) is completely fenced, gated, has barbed wire on top of the fencing, and the area is cleaned twice a day at 8:30 or 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. The gate is locked and closed at 7:30 p.m. The city has budgeted \$19,000 for a compactor and will hire a person to man it seven days a week," she said, adding the compactor may be on site in 60 to 90 days.

Ogle also refuted rumors that the city is reluctant to cite and fine those who ignore requirements for animal proof garbage cans.

"The city is a funding partner with the national park and TWRA to provide the bear control officer position. We are supportive of all efforts to protect the bears, the citizens and our visitors," said Ogle.

