

41 bears die under '2 strikes, you're out' policy

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DENVER — It cost 41 bears their lives for being two-time nuisances in Colorado last year.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife's new procedure for handling nuisance bears included trapping and moving offenders only once. If trapped a second time, the bear was shot.

"I am pleased with the first year," said Tom Beck, the agency's bear expert. "I think we were especially successful in educating people how they can keep their yards clean so they don't attract bears."

Beck said in years past, when a bear raided garbage cans, hummingbird feeders, beehives, orchards or livestock, the owner simply called a local wildlife officer and demanded the bear be removed — which it usually was.

But Beck and other wildlife

biologists started questioning whether relocating bears solved the problem or simply shifted it.

Before the question could be researched, however, a bill was introduced last year in the Colorado Legislature that would have prohibited the transfer or release of any wildlife in the state.

Feeling that the bill, which later died in committee, would limit their options, wildlife officials established a standard bear policy, which became known as the "two strikes, you're out" directive.

"When district wildlife managers were called, they explained the two-strikes policy and most people started asking what they could do to help rather than demand the bear be trapped, relocated and given one strike," Beck said.

But the question of relocation

still wasn't addressed, so Beck is starting a three-year study in Colorado to put a radio collar on every bear captured and relocated to find out where the bear goes and what it does.

"We hope to collar up to 100 bears next summer," Beck said.

Trapped bears receive ear tags so wildlife managers can see they've been handled before.

Recaptures show about one-fourth of the trapped bears get in trouble a second time.

"But what happens to the other 75 percent?" Beck asks. "Do they force a resident bear out? Do they kill it? Do they take over the area and force the resident bear out?"

The radio collars won't answer all the questions, he said, "but if we go flying over the area at least once a week, keeping track of their movements, we should have some answers."