

Drought leads to ‘unprecedented’ black bear conflicts in Wyoming

by Christine Peterson, WyoFile.com

The 5-year-old black bear had a routine. At nightfall, she would climb down out of one of Laramie’s many cottonwood trees, spend the night searching for tasty morsels in city and residential garbage cans, then by 6 a.m. she would find another tree, climb back up, and sleep off all that garbage while 60, 80 or even 100 feet off the ground.

Pictures show her legs free floating on either side of a branch, dangling like a cartoon bear near the city’s historic train depot and across town by baseball fields. Wyoming Game and Fish Department biologists received regular reports of her whereabouts, but she was either 80 feet up a cottonwood tree — too high to dart with no branches to catch her fall — or she’d already moved on, said Lee Knox, Laramie’s Game and Fish’s regional wildlife coordinator.

He’s guessing she spent nearly a month in Laramie before one night in late August she climbed up a spruce tree instead of a cottonwood and someone called Game and Fish in time. Knox requested help from a tree trimming service who arrived with a truck and bucket and hoisted another biologist into the air. The biologist shot the chubby bear with a tranquilizer dart and watched as she tumbled out of the spruce tree like a ball in a game of plinko, the branches slowing her fall before coming to rest in a tarp held slightly off the ground.

He then checked her for injuries, gave her an ear tag to show she’d been captured and drove the sleepy bear to the nearby Snowy Range, where he released her deep in the woods hoping he wouldn’t see her again.

A black bear spending a month loitering in a town of 35,000 people was strange enough. Even weirder was that she wasn’t a young, dumb male bear — she was a 5- to 6-year-old female who had previously reared cubs. Adult females tend to be known more for their caution than recklessness, Knox said. But that’s a reflection of how bad this summer has been for bear and human conflict, not just in southeast Wyoming, but across much of the Mountain West.

“To find a bear in town once or twice a summer wouldn’t be crazy, but this summer was unprecedented,” Knox said. “There’s been an unheard-of number of conflicts. It’s at least three times as bad as the last bad year, and the majority of the conflicts have been more aggressive bear behavior.”

Why, exactly, is anyone’s guess, but one of the biggest drivers is likely an extreme drought causing a decided lack of food. And summer is not over yet.

Black bears in trouble

The Laramie region, which encompasses half of the Sierra Madre range all the way to the Nebraska border, regularly deals with black bear conflict. Several years ago, Game and Fish advised people in the Saratoga Valley and Centennial areas to lock their vehicles because black bears figured out how to open car doors for tasty rewards inside.

This year they’re not only breaking into vehicles but also houses and cabins. Game and Fish has received at least 20 reports of black bear thieves sneaking in through screen doors and sometimes windows. They’ve also wedged themselves through doggy doors, though one bear realized too late it couldn’t get back out the doggy door and ran away with the contraption around its waist.

The issue is even more serious in Colorado, where portions of the state have seen a 219% rise in bear conflicts in the first seven months of the year. And in late August, a black bear broke into a home in Estes Park, Colorado, rooted around in the kitchen and then scratched and knocked over an 80-year-old woman. The woman is recovering from her wounds, according to Denver7, and the bear escaped back through the window.

Northern Wyoming also has been struggling with problem bears, though so far they’ve largely spared houses, opting instead for chicken coops, bird feeders and garbage, said Tim Thomas, Game and Fish’s Sheridan regional wildlife coordinator. In the Bighorn Mountains, a black bear tried climbing in a tent with campers after harassing other campers a few miles away. Game and Fish caught the bear, ran DNA tests to determine it was the same one trying to steal food in campgrounds, and killed it to prevent it from an inevitably more serious conflict.

“We’re seeing issues across both gender and age classes,” Thomas said. “It’s not just young ones getting kicked off mom, they’re all looking for food resources.”

In Muddy Mountain near Casper, the Bureau of Land Management temporarily closed a campground in July after it was visited by a black bear. Because the bear had returned multiple times for food rewards, Wyoming Game and Fish made the decision to euthanize it, an agency spokesperson told Oil City News.

Colorado wildlife officials have killed nearly 300 black bears this year, according to reporting from the Colorado Sun, including an 18-year-old bear whose intestines were completely blocked by plastic garbage bags and “at least 10 nonflushable cleaning wipes.”

Looking for food in all the wrong places

Dan Thompson, Game and Fish’s large carnivore supervisor, figures he’s fielded dozens of calls from journalists this summer wondering why black bear conflict is so much higher than normal.

The simplest answer in regions like Laramie and Sheridan is likely tied to drought and few natural foods. They’re popping up looking for food in places as far away from mountains as Torrington and Pine Bluffs, Knox said, which is not typical bear habitat.

“Hot dry conditions and lower than normal berry abundance and other things like that are contributing factors,” Thompson said.

Berry crops failed in the Sheridan region because of a late frost, and grasses and wildflowers peaked much earlier than normal this year. But lack of food isn’t fully to blame for increased conflict. Fewer bears came into Lander this year, for example, than last year when berry bushes bowed their heads under the weight of their fruit. Last year, Thompson said, bears followed that berry abundance right into the urban-wildland interface.

A larger part of the problem is the combination of scarce wild foods and more readily available human foods. If a hungry bear can’t find anything to eat, it will keep moving. If it discovers trash or other snacks, it will stick around. That’s why Game and Fish asks people year after year to bring bird and dog food into secure places, keep garbage in bear-proof cans and lock down those chicken coops. Because once a bear discovers a cache of easy, tasty food, it won’t forget, Thompson said.

“People should let us know as soon as possible, especially if there’s any conflict activity, if they’re seeing a black bear in an area where they aren’t expecting to,” he said. “People are reluctant to call because they think we will show up and kill a bear.”

And Game and Fish has killed more black bears than normal this year, though Thompson said he wouldn’t know how many exactly until closer to winter when bears are finally in their dens. If people call early, before a bear is habituated to finding human food, Game and Fish has more luck hazing or moving the bear and helping homeowners secure food and other attractants.

“We really need people to give wildlife some grace and be as bear aware as possible,” Knox said. “If you live out of town, especially, anything is possible. It’s Wyoming and it’s a rough year.”

Public notices

Notice of application: Retail Liquor License -- Transfer			
Notice is hereby given that on the 3rd day of August 2026, Maverick Group LLC filed an application to transfer a Retail Liquor License in the office of the Clerk of the Town of Thermopolis for the following building 425 S. 6th Street and protests, if there be any, against the transfer of such license will be heard at the hour of 7:00pm on the 6th day of October 2026, in the Town Hall Council Chambers located at 420 Broadway, Thermopolis, WY.			
Connie Guntly, Clerk/Treasurer			
Pub. Sept. 10 \$ 17, 2026	No. 2181		
FORECLOSURE SALE NOTICE (For Publication)			
WHEREAS NOTICE IS HERBY GIVEN that a default in the payment under the terms of a secured and perfected Note has occurred. The Note is secured by a Mortgage dated January 11, 2021 and recorded on January 20, 2021 at REC#0543145 Book 193, Page 732 in the records of Hot Springs County, Wyoming from Darren D Rowe, to Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc., as mortgagee, as nominee for Fairway Independent Mortgage Corporation for the amount of \$92,424.00. The Mortgage having been assigned to and now in possession of Lakeview Loan Servicing, LLC, through an assignment recorded on May 4, 2026 at REC# 0565953 Book 217, Page 917 in the records of Hot Springs County, Wyoming.			
WHEREAS the Mortgage contains a power of sale, which by reason of the default that has occurred, the Mortgagee has declared to become operative, and no suit or proceeding has been instituted to recover the debt secured by the Mortgage, or any part thereof, nor has any suit or proceeding instituted and the same discontinued and:			
WHEREAS written Notice of Intent to Foreclose by Sale and Advertisement has been served upon the record owner and party in possession of the mortgaged premises at least ten (10) days prior to commencement of the publication, and the amount due upon the Mortgage at the date of first publication of this notice of sale being the total sum of \$82,530.36 which consists of the unpaid principal balance of \$81,204.90, plus outstanding charges, attorney fees, costs expected, accruing interest and late charges after the date of first publication of this notice.			
WHEREAS this property being foreclosed upon may be subject to other liens and encumbrances that will not be extinguished at the sale and any prospective purchaser should research the status of title before submitting a bid.			
NOW, THEREFORE Lakeview Loan Servicing, LLC as Mortgagee, will have			
the Mortgage foreclosed as by law provided by having the mortgaged property sold at public venue by the Sheriff or Deputy Sheriff in and for Hot Springs County, Wyoming to the highest bidder for cash on September 29, 2026 at 11:00 AM at the front door of the Hot Springs County Courthouse located at Hot Springs County Courthouse, 415 Arapahoe Street, , Thermopolis, Wyoming 82443. For application on the above described amounts secured by the Mortgage, said mortgaged property being described as follows, to wit:			
Lot 9 and the East 25 feet of Lot 10, Block 40, Original Townsite to the Town of Thermopolis, Hot Springs County, Wyoming.			
With an address of 939 Warren St, Thermopolis, Wyoming 82443. Together with all improvements thereon situated and all fixtures and appurtenances, thereto.			
Proof of funds are required to bid at sale.			
Lakeview Loan Servicing, LLC [] Scott D. Toeppen, Wyoming State Bar No. 7-5690 [] Aricyn J. Dall, Wyoming State Bar No: 7-6499 Randall S. Miller & Associates, P.C. - CO 216 16th Street, Suite 1210 Denver, CO 80202 Phone: 720-259-6710 wyoming@rsmalaw.com			
Pub. Sept. 3, 10, 17 & 24, 2026 No. 2177			
NOTICE			
The Hot Springs County Board of Commissioners is asking Hot Springs County Residents to apply to serve on the Big Horn Basin Nature and Discovery Center Board to fill two seats.			
Big Horn Basin Nature and Discovery Center Board- HSC/Town Representative (Term through September 30, 2029) Residents of Hot Springs County interested in applying to serve on this Board should submit a County Board Application (available on the County website www.hscounty.com or at the County Clerk’s Office) to the Hot Springs County Clerk’s Office and to Town Hall. Applications will be considered and appointments made at the Hot Springs County Commissioners and Town Council meetings on October 6th, 2026.			
Pub. Sept. 10 & 17, 2026		No. 2184	
ADVERTISEMENT FOR REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS			
Notice is hereby given that the Town of Thermopolis, Wyoming will receive and accept Statements of Qualifications via hard copies submitted by 5:00 P.M., local			
time, October 7, 2026, at the Thermopolis Town Hall, 420 Broadway Street, Thermopolis, Wyoming, for CONSULTING SERVICES FOR A ROAD ACTION PLAN, PER THE SAFE STREETS FOR ALL (SS4A) GRANT. Available funds for the project is \$207,000. The Town of Thermopolis reserves the right to reject any and/or all qualifications and to waive any informalities if deemed in the best interest of the Owner. The full Request for Qualifications and all requirements can be found at thermopoliswy.gov or by emailing, clerk@thermopoliswy.gov			
Dated this 2nd day of September, 2026.		/s/ Town of Thermopolis	
Pub. Sept. 10 & 17, 2026		No. 2183	
COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS			
The Thermopolis Town Council met in Regular Session on September 1, 2026, at 7 pm at Town Hall. Present were Mayor Adam Estenson, Council members Tony Larson, John Dorman Sr., Rachel Hughes and Dusty Lewis. Also, present were Mayor/Codes Administrative Assistant Jim Jeunehomme, Clerk/Treasurer Connie Guntly, Town Attorney Marshall Keller, Public Works Director Basil Sorensen, and Police Chief Pat Cornwell.			
AGENDA: Following the pledge of allegiance Dorman made a motion, seconded by Hughes and carried to approve the agenda.			
MINUTES: Lewis made a motion, seconded by Larson and carried to approve the Minutes from August 4, and August 18, 2026 Council Meetings.			
BILL PAY: Dorman made a motion, seconded by Lewis and carried to approve the list of bills.			
CITIZEN PARTICIPATION: 1. CATERING PERMIT: Gooses’s Inc., requested a permit for September 11, 2026, Cowboy Rendezvous PRCA Tris Munsick Concert at the Fairgrounds. Larson made a motion, seconded by Hughes and carried to approve the 24 hour Catering Permit. Fair board permission was received. 2. FIREWORKS: Concerned citizens addressed Council regarding the home game fireworks and how it negatively affects their dogs.			
DEPARTMENT REPORTS: The following reports were available for review: police, engineering, streets and alleys, water, wastewater, sanitation and landfill.			
POLICE CHIEF: The Community Service Office will be training in Dispatch.			
ENGINEER: Anthony Barnett presented contract documents for the water clarifier and tank painting project for approval. Hughes made a motion, seconded by Lewis and carried to approve Change Order #1 extending the term dates for the project, and Pay Estimate #2 in the amount of \$77,157.07. Barnett also presented the Chip Seal Notice to Proceed for approval, stating the Contractor is working on the bond and should be completed this week. Dorman			
made a motion, seconded by Hughes and carried to approve Notice to Proceed for the Chip Seal Project.			
ADMINISTRATION: Request for Qualifications (RFQ) Safe Streets for All grant Road Action Plan, was presented for approval to release. Larson made a motion, seconded by Dorman and carried to release the RFQ.			
MAYOR AND COUNCIL: Mayor Estenson presented a Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month Proclamation. Hughes requested information about the correspondence from the Worland Mayor, Mayor Estenson explained it was about Property Taxes and the Learning Center is holding a Property Tax 101 seminar on September 10th.			
BILLS: AFLAC, Insurance, \$370.26; Carquest, Supplies \$834.52; Core and Main, Equipment, \$4,989.96; CR Lock, Service Call, \$80.00; Discover Thermopolis, Shipping, \$52.45; Empower, Retirement, \$320.00; Energy Labs, Service, \$471.00; Engineering Assoc., Services, \$38,900.31; Fastenal Comp, Parts, \$39.20; Frandson Safety, Service, \$50.00; HS Vet Clinic, Contract, \$955; HSCSD#1, Fuel, \$5,584.74; Hubele, Zane, Services, \$250.00; Insurance Trust, Premiums, \$52,091; Jadeco, Service, \$285.00; Jasper Weller Truck, Parts, \$650.62; JH Computer, Services, \$252; Keller Law, Service, \$4,400; Laird Sanitation, Service, \$100; Merchant McIntyre, Service, \$5,000; Murdoch Oil Inc, Fuel, \$3,641.59; Napa, Parts, \$896.67; Napa Motor Supply, Supplies, \$236.90; NCPERS, Life Ins., \$160; Newterra Corp, Aerators, 28,710; Northwest Pipe Fittings, Flanges, \$536.61; Office of State Lands and Investment, Loan, \$85,000; O’Reilly, Parts, \$105.34; Q2 Artificial Lift Services, Supplies, \$75.53; Riverton Tire, Parts, \$55.80; Road Runner, Parts, \$475.60; Rocky Mt. Power, Service, \$23,019.27; Staples, File Cabinet, \$92.44; State Engineer Office, Water Permit, \$50.00; Tegeler, Bond Ins, \$50.00; Thermopolis Hardware, Supplies, \$540.06; Police Dept., Petty Cash, \$10.34; T-Mobile, Phone, \$473.69; TOT, Utilities, \$110,775.15; Tractor & Equipment Comp, \$2,807.06; USPS, Postage, \$284.99; Unum, Insurance, \$117.42; USA Bluebook, Supplies, \$418.66; Vexolia WTS, Supplies, \$13,699.62; VSP, Insurance, \$310.83; Williams Law Office, Service, \$900; WY Child Support, \$250.00; Workforce Services, Workers Comp, \$4,816.90; WY APCO Chapter, Registration, \$340.00; WY Retirement, Retirement, \$29,003.14; WY.Com, Service, \$25; Youth Alternatives, Services, \$500; Payroll, \$105,427.68; Payroll Taxes, \$34,381.31.			
At 7:27 pm Larson made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Dorman and carried. The next Council meeting is September 15, 2026, at 7pm.			
ATTEST:			
Connie Guntly Clerk/ Treasurer		Adam R. Estenson, Mayor	
Pub. Sept. 17, 2026		No. 2185	