

Is someone unloading bears in Nassagaweya?

MNR, residents want 'bear' facts on area sightings

By MAGGIE HANNAH
Herald Special
Although bears have apparently been seen several times in recent weeks in Milton (Nassagaweya) and Eramosa Townships, no one has reported the sightings to the ministry of natural resources.

Bruce Buckland, wildlife officer for the ministry's Cambridge office said the ministry heard indirectly of a sow and cub being seen in the Acton area this summer — but that's all.

Meanwhile Vince Synott, a beef farmer on the Fourth Line, three miles south of Rockwood, said he saw bear in with his cattle a couple of weeks ago.

He was watering his garden at dusk and looked up to see his herd running as hard as they could through a field by a swamp. He saw a long, heavy shaggy creature jogging along behind them.

"It was too long and heavy for any dog," he said. "I went into the house for my rifle and then I went down through the field. The dog stayed right with me and he sniffed around very suspiciously but he never left my side. It's just as well as I

didn't see it, I guess. My gun isn't heavy enough for a bear." Between two and three weeks ago, Patricia Lazenby of Crewson's Corners, saw a black bear at the back of her parents' lot just north of the highway.

Before that, however, rumor has it that a group of school children waiting for the bus on the Town Line and Eramosa 5 Sideroad had a bear appear near them.

Contractors building a house on 25 Sideroad and the Nassagaweya Fourth Line are also reported to have seen a bear and one or two cubs at least twice near the construction site.

A Sixth Line resident just north of 25 Sideroad said he heard a very strange noise one morning last week but saw nothing in the dark at 4 a.m. It was too dry to find tracks but when he discussed the sounds with people who know wildlife, they tell him he probably had a bear in his backyard.

Calvin Aitken, the man who shot a bear north of Acton last summer, said he hasn't been called for bears this year although he knows people definitely are seeing them in the area.

Mr. Buckland said the ministry would like to be informed of sightings. It isn't their business to go into the area and destroy the animals just because they're here, but they would be interested in keeping tabs on them.

If there is public demand to have them removed, it would be the ministry's job to try and live trap the animal or animals, he said.

Landowners to whom there is potential danger or damage to their livestock always have the rights to kill bears, he added.

Trapping bears is a difficult task since they range over a wide area, Mr. Buckland said. That is why the ministry would like to be informed of sightings since it might help to establish a pattern to their movements and make capture easier if it becomes necessary.

If trapping becomes necessary the ministry will have to go to Northern Ontario for a culvert trap such as is commonly used there.

A culvert is baited with something probably putrefied meat since the odor will last longest and travel further than that of honey or blueberries, and trap doors on either end are rigged to close, once the animal is inside. Then the bear in the trap is hoisted aboard a small truck and taken off to be released in some less populated spot.

Mr. Buckland said the ministry can't figure out why the area seems to have an influx of bears over the past four years. There are a number of bears in the Bruce Peninsula, he said, but it is a pretty long trip for a bear. They could be following the escarpment, he said, or they could be following the river valleys though the big swamps down from Barrie. The other possibility, and the one of which the ministry is most suspicious, is that someone may be pen-rearing the animals, then releasing them. "We'd almost have to cap-

ture a bear to determine if they are pen-reared," he said. "A pen-reared animal might have more flesh on its bones and its claws would be worn off in a different way if they were held in cement-floored pens."

The bear situation in Nassagaweya-Eramosa is very similar to one the ministry is encountering near the Six Nations Indian Reserve at Brantford, Mr. Buckland said, where they are having a rash of cougars.

The ministry is very suspicious that someone has bears and is releasing them for some reason.

"We wish we knew who might have the bears," he said. "The only place in our area licenced to keep bears is

the African Lion Safari. But people keep the damnest things with these exotic pets now. They don't seem to realize what problems they'll cause for them and then they think they can just let them go rather than destroying them when they get into difficulties. They just don't realize what problems they cause the public."

If the ministry knew who had the bears, they'd either go in and licence them or seize the bears and close them down, he said.

It is possible that the owner who is releasing the animals could live outside the jurisdiction of the ministry's Cambridge office and therefore the animals are coming from outside, he said.

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