

# BEAR

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He was treated in the emergency room and released.

Beckner, who has lived in Sumpter for about a year and a half, said he's convinced the bear felt cornered when it initially tried to flee and ran into a shed near his front door.

"It didn't want to fight me. It just wanted to leave," he said. "It tried to defend itself, and once it realized it could get away, it did."

Brian Ratliff, district wildlife biologist at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife office in Baker City, said he interviewed Beckner about the episode.

Based on Beckner's description, and in particular that the bear fled as soon as it no longer was confined by the shed, Ratliff said he hasn't set up any traps in Sumpter to try to capture the bear.

Ratliff said he would have taken a different approach if



Noah Beckner/Contributed Photo  
**Noah Beckner sustained wounds to his face when he was attacked by a black bear on Thanksgiving night, Nov. 25, 2021, outside his Sumpter home.**

it looked as though the bear had intentionally attacked Beckner.

"It's unfortunate that it happened but the bear didn't seek (Becker) out and attack him, and it didn't come back," Ratliff said. "It was trying to get away."

Ratliff said he planned to notify the Sumpter City Council about the incident, and to remind city officials about the need to urge

*"It didn't want to fight me. it just wanted to leave. It tried to defend itself, and once it realized it could get away, it did."*

— Noah Beckner, who was attacked by a black bear outside his Sumpter home on Thanksgiving night

residents not to keep food sources, including coolers or refrigerators, as well as trash, outdoors in places easily accessible to bears.

Ratliff said he will continue to monitor the situation in Sumpter.

"My biggest concern is that this bear is going to choose not to den up," he said.

Ratliff said Beckner described the bear as very skinny, which suggests that the bear isn't in condition to hibernate.

### Bears aren't uncommon in Sumpter

The historic gold mining town, population 200, is in the midst of a ponderosa pine forest about 27 miles west of Baker City.

his home on Ibex Street, up the hill and about three blocks east of Mill Street, the town's main thoroughfare.

"Bears are constantly walking through Sumpter, every night," he said.

But Beckner had no reason to think about bears when he walked out his front door in the last hour of Thanksgiving.

He didn't hear anything — he was just going outside. The bear was about 5 to 6 feet away.

"I've seen a fair amount of bears, and I recognized it immediately," Beckner said.

The bear turned and ran, but its route was blocked by a shed that's just outside the front door.

Then it spun and ran toward Beckner.

"It slashed at my face but I moved out of the way and it just nicked me," he said.

The bear then stood on its hind legs.

Beckner, who is about 5-foot-9, said the bear was slightly taller than he is.

He said he "wrestled

for a little bit" with the bear, during which the bear briefly bit his shoulder.

Beckner said he then punched the bear. He said the bear backed up slightly and, once it realized its path was not blocked by the shed, it ran down the hill.

"I never saw it again after that," he said.

Beckner estimated the incident lasted 45 seconds or so.

Although the bear was emaciated, Beckner, who has competed in wrestling and grappled with opponents up to 250 pounds, said he's "never felt a human so strong as that."

He said he understands that leaving food or trash in accessible places can entice bears, and he strives to avoid such situations on his property.

Beckner said he thinks he was simply unlucky, and the incident didn't make him more fearful of bears.

"If it had not been for the fact that it got cornered it wouldn't have attacked me," he said.

# SALMON

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Becky Johnson, production division director for the tribe's Fishery Resource Management, was there when nearly 500,000 smolt were released into the Lostine River in 2017. She described the release as "awesome." The results were almost immediate — the next year, two coho were caught in the tribe's weir. Then, in 2021, 88 fish were caught in the net.

"Salmon are a really amazing, resilient creature, and if you just give them half a chance, if you provide the right conditions, the habitat and the clean water — I've been impressed with what they can do," Johnson said.

To be sure, not every coho released into the Lostine would return — pre-

duction and harvesting take their toll, as do natural diseases and parasites. Many more would return to different streams to spawn, in a process called straying. Still, the return is more than welcomed, and their journey was a long one in both length and time.

"We have a lot of work, we've only just begun really, but I know from our experience from over here in the Clearwater that it can be really successful," Johnson said.

Between 1980 and 1996, a total of only 89 coho salmon were counted at the Lower Granite Dam. Due to the reintroduction efforts, the fish have returned to the Snake River in higher numbers — though far removed from their previous numbers, before the construction of the eight dams between the Pacific Ocean and the confluence between the

Clearwater River and the Snake River at Lewiston, Idaho.

"I want to put it in context, though," Johnson said, "because you know coho used to be very abundant up here just like spring chinook and fall chinook and steelhead. Historically, there were probably about 200,000 coho that returned here (to the Lostine River). So we're super excited — happy to see this return of coho this year, but also want to contextualize that this is a mere fraction of what it used to be like here."

According to Johnson, the program to reintroduce coho to the Lostine is based on the tribe's success in the Clearwater Basin. The tribe reintroduced the salmon to the Clearwater and Snake basin areas in the late 1990s. Before then, the fish were extinct in the area.

The fish were bred from

stock collected at the Bonneville Dam. The next phase of the Lostine coho program will use returned fish as brood stock for the next generation of salmon, hoping to make use of the fish that made the long journey home.

"Those fish have survived," Johnson said. "They've not only migrated out as juveniles for 600 or so miles over eight dams to the ocean, but then they also turned around and came back up those eight dams over those 600 miles, so we want to use those genetics, you know that stamina from those adults for the next generation. That's what we did on the Clearwater, and it's been pretty successful."

At the same time as the record-breaking coho run, a smaller number of chinook and steelhead runs have made their way back up the rivers. Steelhead trout, espe-

cially, were returning in much lower numbers than before.

Just 39,359 steelhead have made it past the Lower Granite Dam this year, in contrast to its 10-year average of 59,147, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The 2020 numbers for steelhead were 55,307, according to the same data.

But the reason for the coho's greater numbers have flummoxed experts.

"Coho are bonkers all the way up the West Coast, and I don't really know why to be honest," said Kyle Bratcher, a fish biologist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. "There's something going on in the ocean that's changed that's allowed them to do well."

The effects of the recent drought, as well, could play a part in the years to come, Bratcher said, though the

effect will be muted by regional environmental factors and the current La Nina weather system.

It also will be some time before the impact of the drought can be accurately gauged, as the life cycle of chinook, coho and steelhead vary — steelhead and chinook can take up to six years to make a return, while coho's much shorter lifespan of two to three years means that it can act as a bellwether for ocean and weather conditions.

"We get a little bit lucky sometimes because we have the Willowa Mountains here, we tend to still keep a little cool water around even when it gets pretty bad," Bratcher said. "We didn't see any of that this year but where it's going to hurt us — the drought — is probably in the next two or three years, especially in the return."

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