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Guarding against bears

Homeowners groups working to encourage bruins to eat elsewhere

By Shane Benjamin

Herald Staff Writer

While many La Plata County residents have been slow to bear-proof their trash cans, several homeowners associations are picking up the slack.

In the Falls Creek subdivision northwest of Durango, residents grew tired of watching 200-pound bruins jump on plastic lids covering Dumpsters and making a mess of the trash.

About two years ago, Falls Creek resident Glenn Sears designed a metal lid that could be propped open and latched closed. The homeowners association commissioned Rusty's Welding & Steel, located in the Animas Valley, to build the lids and retrofit them at the subdivision's four dump sites. There has not been a single instance of **bears** making a mess of trash since, Sears said.

"We've made them in such a way that they're not heavy to lift," he said about the metal lids.

Bear-proofing trash cans is a permanent solution to a never-ending problem, said Bryan Peterson, director of Bear-Smart Durango.

"There is some cost involved with bear-proofing your trash, but it's better than picking up trash, and it's better for **bears** and other wildlife if it's taken care of," Peterson said.

Ron Trujillo, who is implementing the covenants for three subdivisions west of Durango, is making bear-proof containers mandatory for all property owners. He said the trash cans can cost up to \$600, but they are 100 percent effective.

Trujillo's subdivisions include Destination Ranch, which will have 16 homes at full build out; Cross Creek Ranch, which will have 19 homes; and Fountain of Truth Ranch, with up to five homes.

Trujillo said prospective homeowners are not bothered by the covenant requiring bear-proof trash cans.

"Most of the people who buy property out there are level-headed about those things, and they want to protect the **bears** from becoming domesticated," he said.

Residents living in the county can acquire "bear-resistant" trash cans, also called critter locks, at no extra cost if they contract service through Phoenix Recycling LLC. The trash cans have two bungee straps on two sides of the container that latch to hooks. It takes garbage men longer to pick up trash because they have to get out of the truck, but it is highly effective at keeping **bears**, crows and dogs out of the trash, said Alex Arribau, co-owner of Phoenix Recycling.

Trash cans with critter locks also can take a hit by a snowplow and stay closed, she said.

Six to seven years ago, **bears** had no problem finding a quick meal at the Needles Townhomes, 46850 U.S. Highway 550, said Reed Davis, resident manager. Then the homeowners association built a structure around the neighborhood dumpsite with a roof. It worked for a little while, but about three years ago, **bears** tore the doors off, Davis said. The structure was repaired with metal panels around the doors to prevent the problem from happening again. "If they can't get in, they'll go on," Davis said.

The city of Durango also offers bear-proof trash cans. But only four of the \$150 receptacles were sold last year, and it doesn't appear any have been sold this year, said Durango Public

Works Director Jack Rogers.

The city has installed bear-proof trash containers at two locations in town: Fassbinder Park and the Lion's Den.

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A bear snoops around trash containers in early June near Eighth Street and East Seventh Avenue. Bear-proof cans can help keep **bears** from making a mess on trash day.

JERRY McBRIDE/Herald

Mark Thompson, owner of Phoenix Recycling, closes and secures the lid of one of his bear-resistant trash containers. The container has teeth marks on the lid from a bear that unsuccessfully tried to get to the contents.