

ABC-10 News

Bear League tactics scrutinized in Tahoe court hearing

Although a former Nevada state senator who claimed he was harassed by a group of bear activists failed Wednesday in his bid to obtain a protective order, the judge hearing the case warned the group its tactics could lead to trouble in the future.

Tensions still high in Incline Village between bear activists and government.

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INCLINE VILLAGE, NEVADA - Although a former Nevada state senator who claimed he was harassed by a group of bear activists failed Wednesday in his bid to obtain a protective order, the judge hearing the case warned the group its tactics could lead to trouble in the future.

Bill O'Donnell, who lives in Las Vegas but owns vacation rental property on Lakeshore Blvd. in Incline Village, said the vacation property has been damaged by bears three times in the past two years.

After the Nevada Department of Wildlife set a live trap on the property May 8 at O'Donnell's request, activists affiliated with the Bear League began a multi-day vigil outside the property to prevent any bears from entering the trap.

The trap was removed May 14.

O'Donnell filed for a protective order against the Bear League and four individuals and during Wednesday's hearing in Incline Village Justice Court he implored Justice of the Peace E. Alan Tiras to grant it.

"I'm asking for this restraining order to protect my family and my property," O'Donnell said from the witness stand.

Under questioning, Bear League executive director Ann Bryant, board member Carolyn Stark and two volunteers denied harassing O'Donnell or trespassing on his property.

They said they were contacted multiple times by Washoe County sheriff's deputies who agreed they were not doing anything unlawful.

Stark said the group tried to counsel O'Donnell on proper ways to secure garbage that would avoid bear encounters, and in court O'Donnell admitted he

had no interest in installing a bear-proof container because it's not required by law.

Stark said the group is frustrated by wildlife officials who set bear traps without first insisting property owners modify their behavior.

"We have issues with the Department of Wildlife and their policies and we want to peacefully protest traps because they don't solve the problem," Stark said in an interview outside the courtroom.

Tiras disputed claims by the activists that they are protected by the First Amendment because they brought air horns to the vigil in an attempt to undermine the Department of Wildlife.

He declined to issue a protective order, but only because the trap and the protestors were no longer at the property.

The judge suggested he would consider a protective order to prevent the Bear League from engaging in future bear trap vigils.

O'Donnell seemed satisfied as he left the courtroom even though his application was denied.

"I believe that the information that was presented tells a story and tells the real truth about what's going on here," he said.

Bear League attorney Susanna Truax Kintz said the group would consider legal options to continue its work.