

Grizzly shot, killed near family's North Idaho home

Eli Frankovich/SR

A 2-year-old male grizzly bear threatening a North Idaho family was shot and ultimately killed on Tuesday. Now Barbara Casey, who shot the bear, is worried she's in trouble for killing a federally protected species.

"I don't want to go to prison for saving my family and my animals," Casey said.

Lucas Swanson, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game conservation officer who responded to the call, said the incident is under investigation. Grizzly bears can only be legally killed when they're threatening human life, he said. Swanson wouldn't comment on specifics of the investigation. He said it could take several months before Fish and Game releases a report on the incident.

Casey said she was inside her home in Moyie Springs in Boundary County when her 14-year-old daughter Kaylee Rose came rushing into the house saying there was a bear in the backyard.

"I thought, 'Oh, that's kind of cool; the kids will see a black bear. We will scare it off with some pans,' " Casey said.

So, the family stood on the porch and started banging pots, pans and an empty oxygen bottle together in an effort to scare the bear away, she said.

But that didn't work. The bear started charging toward the electric fence protecting the family's horses. Casey ran inside and got her .22-caliber handgun and started shooting warning shots, again trying to scare the bear off, she said.

"It started coming at us like it was a dog," Casey said.

She went back inside the house, she said, and grabbed her .45-caliber handgun. Meanwhile, her children tried to save the family chickens, which were loose in the yard. The bear started running after the children.

"Then I realized it wasn't a black bear, it was a grizzly," Casey said.

Fearing for her children, Casey started firing the rifle, still trying not to hit the bear, she said. She yelled at her kids to go down the hill to a neighboring home. They did. Her .45 jammed. Casey grabbed her other gun, a .22-caliber rifle.

The bear stopped. Casey stopped shooting, and it was quiet, she said.

Then Casey's dog barked. The bear, who had turned away from Casey, turned around and charged, she said. Casey shot it twice from about 20 feet away, once in the gut. The bear ran down the hill, where a neighbor later shot it in the head.

"I'm still shaking really bad," Casey said a day later. "It was the most horrible thing."

Wayne Kasworm, a biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said the bear was trapped and collared about 20 miles north of Troy, Montana, three weeks ago. The bear was released at the site of capture, Kasworm said. From where it was captured to where it was killed is between 5 and 10 miles. As far as Kasworm knew, the bear had no previous history with humans.

The Wildlife Service collars bears to understand population trends and threats to the species. There are fewer than 2,000 bears in the lower 48 states, and 50 bears in the Cabinet-Yaak survey area, a zone designated for grizzly recovery in Western Montana and eastern parts of North Idaho, he said.

Although Kasworm doesn't know the details of this case, he said a bad year for berries may lead to increased bear-human encounters.

Casey said Fish and Game officers told her she probably wouldn't be criminally charged. However, she's still worried, especially when she thinks about the [Jeremy Hill case](#). In May 2011, Hill, a resident of Porthill, Idaho, shot and killed a 2-year-old male grizzly near his home. Initially, Hill was charged with a misdemeanor. However, he received a noncriminal citation and was fined \$1,000.

A conviction for killing a grizzly bear illegally can result in up to a year in prison and fines up to \$50,000.