Its time to leave the safety of the rehabilitation enclosure.
After being tranquilized, the first bear is loaded on a vet stretcher for its trip to be weighed. This bear weighed almost 85 pounds.
Record keeping at each step is necessary. Shown is the darting stick and hobbling shackles used to insure safe handling while transporting and checking the bears.
The bears are given a sedative and then taken by stretcher from the rehabilitation nest to the weighing, tagging, and blood taking procedure.
Records are kept on the sex, weight, tag number, radio transmitter id, date etc. before final release back into the wild.
Taking blood samples from each bear is standard practice.
Ear tags help identify bears after their release into the wild. The tag placement does not hurt the bear because it has been sedated.
This bear will not be leaving today, and will be transported to Mendocino next week. Bears are returned to the area found before rehabilitation when possible. This bear needs to become accustomed to being alone so she does not look for her friends after being released.
Cheryl Millham is checking the bear after being weighed and shackled. A transmitter has been affixed to its ear, its eyes protected with salve, and a hood covers its face. Rubber balloon gloves were filled with warm water and tucked between the legs to keep the bear from being cold.
Shackling and eye protection are being applied at the same time while still on the scale platform after being weighed. The weight was recorded.
Ear tags are recorded for future identification.
The left ear is tagged with number 8486 and a transmitter is attached to her right ear for tracking in the wild.
Teamwork. Preparing the two bears for release.
Fish and Game making the transport trailer ready to receive the two bears.
Claws to dig through snow and fend off intruders. Claws to stay safe in a dangerous environment. This is not a pet and is extremely strong even at this young age.
Loading the bears into the trailer for their trip to a remote new den and freedom.
Happiness is watching wild young bears leaving for the wilderness. It is a big relief to see healthy bears get a good start to a life of adventure and freedom from civilization. It is very expensive and time consuming to make such an achievement. The Millham’s lives are devoted to giving the bears a helping hand, but without contact and without interfering with the bears wild nature. These are not pets, and not loving animals, but wild creatures that have been raised to independence with a minimum of human contact.

Tom and Cheryl Millham say goodbye to a wild young bear! Happy trails to you and freedom.
Arriving at Sagehen Creek Field Station, and more paperwork by Shelly to document their release trip back to nature. They traveled about an hour and a half from the Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, Inc. Center. Somewhat groggy, but they are ready and in good shape for the final leg of this trip.
Given some veterinary care before the final trip to their new hibernation den. It is about one thirty in the afternoon on January 26th, 2011. The day is sunny and not very cold for a winters day here north of Truckee California off highway 89 on an unmarked muddy road.
The first bear has been loaded into the back of the Bombardier snow cat owned by the University of California Berkeley.
Loading the second bear into the snow cat after some veterinary care to prepare it for its final trip to its den.
The bears are checked and made comfortable for the noisy trip through the snow covered dirt road.
This is a view above the cab taken from the bear resting platform toward the direction of travel.
Part of the bear release team had to follow the snow cat since room was scarce for everyone on the Bombardier.
Joy at approaching the last leg of the trip, only requiring a short sled ride for the bears to the winter den. There is a small stream and good bear habitat here. These are very lucky wild bears. The people are happy, but the bears are sleeping and not getting any human contact that they will remember.
Preparing the sled to transport the bears. Smiles everywhere. These people care very deeply that the bears get their freedom and stay wild. This kind of care with nothing in return except knowing the bears are getting a chance to live free and are healthy, gives hope for humans future.
People care enough about creatures that share our planet to give enormous effort and pay dearly to keep them wild. I am sure those bears do not know what engineering and cost allowed their safe release. They are even equipped with transmitters to make sure they have been launched successfully.
Bear habitat. Those lucky bears had a rough beginning, but look at them now. Thanks Cheryl and Tom Milham, and thanks Fish and Game and the Great State of California, Cris, Shelly, Berry, and all the others who helped.
Loading the bears into the sled for the final push to the den.
Loading the second bear into the sled takes only a few minutes, and is accomplished with smiles all around.
The final sled ride to the den goes where vehicles can not travel. Human power in the early afternoon is easier because of the cooperating weather.
The two bears arrive at the edge of their den in great shape. All that is left is to unwrap them and place them in their den. The den is already made up with a snow covered igloo sponsored by Petsmart and some straw from their nest at the Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, Inc. Habitat.
You can see the opening to the bear den, at the bottom of the hole. The Douglas fir tree branches are ready to cover the bear entrance after inserting the bears. A large diameter plastic pipe (about 4” diameter) extends at a angle up into the air to provide air incase the snow completely covers the den opening after new storms pass through the area.
The first bear is unshackled, and the face mask removed before handing it off to the two people standing in the hole at the mouth of the den.
One person is inside the bear den to take the bear into the nest and make sure it is resting and breathing comfortably. The air tube is shown just above the head of the lower left person.
Bears are in their nest and just out of sight in this time exposure, but you can see the nest material and inside the igloo interior.
This is a close-up, showing the bears resting inside the igloo. Very low light did not allow a very good photo, but they looked comfortable, in good condition, and ready to have the igloo entrance closed over with the fir branches.
This is what they see after emerging from the den. This is great bear habitat. There is plenty of water and things to eat. These are lucky bears indeed.
The bears on their own, and it is time to leave them to fend for themselves. Of course, the radio tags, and remote camera will not be intrusive to their wild freedom but will let their human friends know they are well. The snow cat is pulling away from the hibernation area and returning to the research facilities.
It is time to leave the bears alone, for a long life away from cities and cars and people. Thanks to the University of California, the California Fish and Game people, the Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care, Inc. center and all the volunteers and contributors and layers of efforts to make this bear release possible.