

Bike thieves find opportunity in laid-back Bend

By Claire Withycombe
The Bulletin

BEND (AP) — Marc Doering says he's going to get a "pretty gigantic lock" the next time he tries to ride a bike downtown.

Doering, who lives in Bend, had a Specialized Rockhopper stolen from NW Brooks Street a couple of weeks ago. The bike, a Christmas gift from his father, was secured with a cable lock, which someone had sawed through.

"From now on I'm really (going to) rethink wanting to ride around downtown," Doering said in an interview Thursday. "I thought it was a safe place for things. But I guess it's kinda not looking that way."

Bicycle theft in Bend is nothing new, but it appears Bend's laid-back reputation may serve opportunistic thieves here.

Those looking to pilfer and, often, resell a bike — or more esoteric gear like kayaks and stand-up paddleboards — have myriad opportunities when unsuspecting citizens leave their equipment unsecured.

According to Bend Police, 206 bikes and 87 other pieces of sporting equipment have already been reported stolen this year. Last year, 505 total bikes and other gear were reported stolen.

Pam Himstreet, who lives near the Deschutes River Trail, had a Trek bike outfitted with Shimano parts disappear from her open garage about five years ago. Its estimated value? \$2,900.

"I put it up on some hooks that were close to the ceiling of the garage to get it out of the way," Himstreet said. "And it was in the back of the garage in the bay, but I had sold the car, so they could see the bike. If you have something good, don't put it where people could easily find it."

Though thousand-dollar mountain bikes are certainly attractive to thieves, they're not the only ones disappearing. Kristin Walker said her 12-year-old daughter's bike, purchased new from Target, was stolen out of the backyard of their Northeast Bend home in mid-July.

"I'm a single mom and working, and I saved and saved and saved to move back here," Walker, who recently moved from the Portland area, said. "I don't have that kind of money to spend all the time."

So what's so lucrative about the business of stealing gear? The landscape that brings recreationists to Bend in the first place may fuel an economy for sporting

equipment — both in Central Oregon and elsewhere, and through legal and illegal means.

"These are high-end and desired items," said Bend Police Sgt. Daniel Ritchie. "They end up in pawn shops not just here in Central Oregon, but throughout Oregon, Washington and California, without identifying characteristics. They're being sold at garage sales, parking lot sales, flea markets, any way they can get rid of them. They go undetected for us."

Bikes in particular are designed to move quickly and efficiently, making them easy fodder for thieves of varying levels. But when most equipment is stolen, it certainly seems like a crime of opportunity, Ritchie said.

"There's nothing we can pinpoint that makes them a target other than it's convenient and people keep them in vehicles," Ritchie said.

According to Ritchie, two of the biggest property crimes seen in Bend are thefts from vehicles and thefts of bicycles — sometimes both at once.

In Portland, a city where the police bureau has a task force devoted to bike thefts, people may be more cautious. It may take a shift in thinking to reduce the number of

equipment thefts locally.

"Be conscious of where you leave your stuff," Ritchie said.

If a bike is unlocked or you can cut through the lock easily, stealing it can become a quick way to turn a couple of hundred bucks, or more. Some thieves, Ritchie said, are supporting a drug habit. There are thieves who work in organized groups to systematically steal and resell herds of bikes, while others still are just out for a joyride.

For their part, pawn shops have to follow protocols when accepting equipment, Ritchie said. But the rise of the Internet as a marketplace may contribute to the problem. People can resell bikes quickly and privately in an entirely different city or state.

"When you go on and use an online outlet, there's no checks and balances there," Ritchie said, "unless the victim and officers are actively looking. And they have to be looking in the right place."

Doering said he's been trawling Craigslist posts in Bend, Portland and Seattle for his bike and filed a police report. "I (don't) really expect anything to come out of it," he said.

Local consignment shops that specialize in outdoors gear

have strict processes to break the cycle of theft, according to Mike Cumbie, who works at the Gear Peddler in Northeast Bend.

The Gear Peddler vets consigners, collects their contact information and has them sign a three-month contract. Consigners are paid when the item is sold.

"When we do a three-month contract we pull all of the consigner's info including their home address (and) driver's license number," Cumbie said. "And we've been very, very aggressive with that. We've actually busted several people who have tried to sell stolen goods, so that word gets around to those folks."

The shop even keeps a log of stolen bikes that includes photos, police case numbers and descriptions or other identifying information about the bike. The log, maintained since the shop opened about 10 years ago, has also helped stop thieves in their tracks.

Rob McDonald, an owner of Stand on Liquid Paddleboards in Bend, which manufactures and rents stand-up paddleboards, said a couple of his customers have had boards stolen.

One was stolen when a garage door was left open, and another was taken from

Riverbend Park when the paddleboarder was on a quick trip back to the car. The latter was eventually recovered after the customer filed a police report, McDonald said.

That's where the Web can play a helpful role.

"Apparently it was posted on Facebook and went social," McDonald said. "Someone saw that board on top of a car and the police got involved and the board got recovered."

Walker, whose daughter's bike was stolen, said it was lying in the backyard behind a 6-foot-high fence. Walker reported the theft to police and posted an ad on Craigslist, but said she's had no leads so far.

Everybody can take precautions to protect their equipment, according to Ritchie and Mark Campbell, who manages Pine Mountain Sports.

The security of your bike depends on the quality of your lock. Of the 35 bikes stolen from downtown last year, 22 of them were locked up, Ritchie said.

"The more you spend on the lock the more safe that lock will be," Campbell said. He said for a high-end mountain bike, the appropriate price point for a lock would be \$60 or \$70, but for a child's bike parked at school, an inexpensive cable lock should be fine.

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