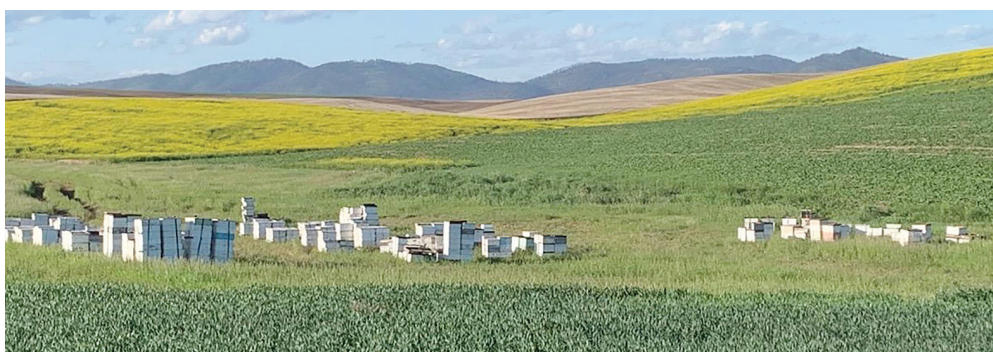


‘Sting’ operation nabs man alleged to be beehive thief

In a case of ‘citizen detective work,’ beekeepers, farmers and police solved a mystery and caught an alleged thief

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN
Capital Press



Courtesy of Dave Smouse

This is the original photo in which Dave Smouse recognized his stolen beehives on a farmer’s property and used the photo to track down the location.

A man charged with stealing hundreds of beehives across the West has been arrested in Washington state in a joint “sting” effort by authorities and local beekeepers.

Officials say the bees could be worth more than \$200,000, and the suspect has likely victimized more than 30 people across California, Washington, Montana, Idaho and Oregon.

Lincoln County Sheriff’s Office in Washington state arrested Perry Davis Bayes, 56, Sunday and charged him with possession of stolen property in the first degree, a class B felony. It is not yet known if he has a lawyer and court dates remain uncertain.

Pollination is a big business — hives rent for \$200 to \$300 — and agricultural detectives say hive heists have resulted in millions of dollars in losses for beekeepers in recent years.

This story, officials say, is an example of “citizen detective work” — with beekeepers, farmers and officers working together to solve the mystery.

The trail to find the thief started at Columbia Pollination, saddled between Moses Lake and George, Wash.

April 6, Dave Smouse,

the company’s owner and beekeeper, said he discovered more than 200 of his hives were missing on a property along Interstate 90.

Smouse said the only marks left behind were “real skinny” vehicle tracks.

His loss of beehives was worth more than \$25,000.

Smouse said he called the Grant County Sheriff’s Office. An officer told Smouse he’d look into it, but the theft remained unsolved.

More than a month later, on May 31, another Washington beekeeper’s hives were missing.

Bud Wilhelm, an Othello, Wash., beekeeper, had 64 of his hives stolen in Lincoln County and 84 stolen in Grant County.

Wilhelm said reporting the case was complicated because it spanned two counties and separate sheriff’s offices didn’t often work together on cases.

Early in June, Wilhelm said he called the Lincoln County Sheriff’s Office. The officers were eager to help, Wilhelm said, but Sheriff Wade Magers told the Capital Press that without the help of beekeeping and farming communities, the agency likely wouldn’t have

cracked the case.

The mystery was unraveled, Magers said, “through teamwork, creativity and a bit of luck.”

Through an online group, Wilhelm met Smouse. When the two exchanged their stories of stolen bees, they noticed something in the crime scene photos: the same unique tire tracks, an unintended calling card.

“We realized: Hey, this is the same thief. So we linked together to track him down,” said Wilhelm.

Wilhelm contacted farmers in his area and asked them to take pictures of the honey bees on their land, thinking perhaps they might unknowingly be hosting stolen bees.

He was right.

June 6, Smouse recognized his hives in a photo submitted by a farm.

But Smouse couldn’t get ahold of the farmer. He recognized the hill range and could tell the crop was canola, so he set out to find it, thinking it would be simple.

“Turns out, there’s lots of canola fields,” Smouse said.

Finally, he found a farm that matched the photo.

The farmer, who has

chosen not to be named, was shocked to learn he had stolen bees on his property. He pointed Smouse to the bees’ source: Perry Davis Bayes.

Smouse, Wilhelm and the sheriff’s office soon learned that Bayes was selling honey, bee starter kits and other equipment across the West.

Smouse had found many of his bees, but Wilhelm’s hives were still missing.

Online, Wilhelm found a former employee of Bayes, who led him to 128 of his 148 stolen hives in northern Idaho. The former employee, those familiar with the case say, was likely naive rather than an accomplice.

On many of the stolen hives, Bayes had allegedly painted over original logos, covered brandings and sometimes even chopped up hives, moving bees to new containers.

It was time for an arrest.

June 14, the Lincoln County Sheriff’s Office staged a sting. The department has limited staff and hours, so officers partnered with the beekeepers for the stakeout.

Officers posed as farmers owning land where Bayes kept allegedly stolen bees.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON KEEPING HIVES SAFE

ADVICE ON PREVENTING HIVE THEFT:

Tim Hiatt, Legislative Chair of Washington State Beekeepers Association: Consider embedding GPS sensors inside beehives so they can be tracked if stolen.

Sheriff Wade Magers: If your hives are stolen or you suspect illegal activity, call your local sheriff’s office immediately. Don’t wait.

Max Cherney, director of operations at Nectar.buzz, a pollination technology company: If you’re a beekeeper, apply this fall to participate in an experiment testing hive tracking technology.

Bud Wilhelm, beekeeper: Mark your hives clearly and document your process. Burnt-in branding is harder to cover up than stencils.

Dave Smouse, beekeeper: If you’re a farmer renting or keeping someone’s bees on your land, watch for theft, be suspicious of mismatched beehives and pay attention to the logos/brands on hives.

They texted Bayes, telling him the field would be sprayed by a crop duster and advising him to move the bees.

Wilhelm and Smouse camped out overlooking the field the night of June 13, watching for Bayes’ vehicle.

About 3:30 a.m., the beekeepers say they saw a flash of lights. The driver turned off the headlights and pulled through the field.

As the sun crept up, the suspect loaded hives onto his truck using a forklift.

The beekeepers called the sheriff’s office.

Fifteen minutes later, according to agency records, Deputy Luke Mallon arrived.

The beekeepers say they recall waiting another 15 minutes.

“It was pretty intense. Nail-biting. We were worried the thief might leave before getting arrested or that he might have a gun. We

didn’t know anything about this guy,” said Smouse.

Smouse said he had become friends with Deputy Mallon through the few weeks of the investigation, and he felt afraid for Mallon’s life — especially since the deputy’s wife had a baby on the way.

“If something happens to him, I thought, I’ll carry that for the rest of my life,” he said.

Finally, Mallon called the beekeepers: the suspect was in handcuffs. And there on the ground were the same strange tire markings — from his “ratty old” forklift.

Beekeepers across the West are getting stolen hives returned, although they are still waiting for a search warrant on Bayes’ phone to clear so they can track down the remaining hives.

Sheriff Magers called the arrest and restoration “a very sweet ending” to a sticky story.

Jerome Rosa leaves Oregon Cattlemen’s Association, search for replacement underway

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press



Jerome Rosa

SALEM — The removal of gray wolves from Oregon’s endangered species list is a defining moment of Jerome Rosa’s six-year tenure as executive director of the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association.

The decision permitted the killing of problem wolves that prey on livestock in Eastern Oregon, which was a key policy objective of the OCA.

“That was really monumental,” Rosa said.

A framed copy of House Bill 4040, which nullified an environmentalist lawsuit over the wolf delisting in 2016, hangs on his office wall in Salem.

Rosa will soon take down the framed bill and pack it with his other belongings when he leaves the OCA to take over as executive director of the Arizona Cattle Growers Association next month.

As OCA’s leaders begin looking for Rosa’s replacement, they say his work with legislators and regulators exemplifies his value to the organization.

Rosa “elevated the profes-

sionalism” of OCA and he “had a big presence at the Capitol that will be missed,” said Todd Nash, the group’s president-elect and a Wallowa County rancher.

Whoever steps into Rosa’s shoes must establish a solid connection with lawmakers, industry leaders and the OCA’s rancher members, Nash said.

“Communication in all of that is huge,” he said.

It’s not an easy time for the cattle industry, which had faced several tough economic years even before the coronavirus outbreak, he said.

The organization’s next executive director will need an in-depth understanding of the problems facing cattle producers and ability to navigate the legislative landscape while also managing OCA’s finances, staff and regular meetings, said Tom Sharp, a Harney County rancher and the group’s current president.

“We’re looking for a lot

of capability,” Sharp said. “That’s a lot I’m asking for and a lot that we’re looking for.”

During Rosa’s time at the organization, he’s been instrumental in hiring and overseeing the OCA’s staff, Sharp said. “The employees just keep getting better and more competent at doing a great job for our membership.”

The OCA will be conducting an open search, inviting applicants to interview for the position rather than simply offering the job to someone in the cattle industry, said Rodger Huffman, the organization’s treasurer and a Union County rancher.

The group will be looking for someone with similar dedication and compassion as Rosa, who was always eager to discuss challenges and concerns with OCA members, Huffman said. “We could text or call Saturday night or Sunday morning, it really didn’t matter.”

Suit claims Colville National Forest fails to protect wolves

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

A federal lawsuit alleges the U.S. Forest Service has failed to make ranchers co-exist with wolves in the Colville National Forest in northeast Washington, leading to conflicts with livestock and the lethal removal of wolves.

Filed by three environmental groups, the suit names only the Forest Service and regional supervisors as defendants. The complaint, however, singles out the Diamond M Ranch, the largest in the region, for allegedly not adapting to wolves.

Diamond M partner Len McIrvine said Tuesday the ranch is considering intervening in the lawsuit to make sure that the claims are vigorously fought and grazing protected. The lawsuit falsely portrays the Diamond M as the instigator of lethal control, he said.

“They act like it’s all Diamond M cattle, yet there are other allotments intermingled with ours suffering losses and depredations,” McIrvine said.

The 1.1 million-acre Colville National Forest covers about one-third of Ferry, Pend Oreille and Stevens counties and includes 810,000 acres for grazing, according to a new forest plan adopted in October. The plan replaced a document written in 1988.

WildEarth Guardians, Western Watersheds Project and the Kettle Range Conservation Group claim the new plan unlawfully fails to consider whether the return of wolves has made land unsuitable for grazing.

The suit was filed in U.S. District Court for Eastern Washington. Efforts to obtain comment from the Forest Service were unsuccessful.

Wolves, not federally protected in northeast Washington, receive slight mention in the new forest plan. The Forest Service should have considered the benefits of wolves and updated grazing plans to avoid conflicts, said Tim Coleman, executive director of the Kettle Range Conservation Group.

“The complaint never alleges that grazing is inappropriate. We’re just trying to get the Colville National Forest to do its job,” he said. “Wolves are part of the mix now and the Forest Service didn’t address that.”

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife decides when to shoot wolves to stop attacks on livestock, including on federal land.

Even though the Forest Service doesn’t pull the trigger, “the blood of these wolves is on the Forest Service’s hands,” said Samantha Bruegger, WildEarth Guardians wildlife coexistence campaigner.

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