

Local

Sumpter hears more about bears

BY MEGHAN ANDERSCH
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Sumpter City Council met November 14th with Mayor Cary Clarke and Council members Samantha Rowan and Linda Wise in attendance. Minutes of the 10/10/17 Council meeting and payment of bills were unanimously approved.

Fire Dept. Report

Fire Chief Kurt Clarke expressed his appreciation for the generous donation to the Department from the family of Glen Wullf. He also thanked everyone who helped with the Spaghetti Feed. They had about 20-30 more in attendance than in the past with profits at right at around the usual \$1,000.

The second burn pile day went well; they were busy all day. On the last drill day, they changed antifreeze and did other maintenance. They also picked up benches and put them under the pavilion one night.

The last month saw three EMS calls and one fire call in which Sumpter was responding as mutual aid. They were half-way through town when advised to stand down as Powder River said they could have put out the fire with a Tonka truck.

Clarke reported attending the Urban-Wildland Interface training in La Grande and said it was a good class and the information quite applicable to Sumpter.

Planning Report

John Young reported the Commission held one meeting. They had one application that they took care of. They also worked a bit on Goal 12 of the Comprehensive Plan.

Mayor Clarke asked about progress on the Evacuation Plan. Young stated he has been working on it and will have it to Council no later than March.

Bears

Brian Ratliff and Nick Myatt from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) addressed Council and the audience about Sumpter's unusual bear activity this fall.

Ratliff said reports started in September. One bear was on a porch and stuck its head in when the homeowner opened the door. The owner shot the bear and it ran off. More reports were received of bears trying to get into porch freezers and refrigerators, climbing over cars, and getting into various things.



Meghan Andersch / The Baker County Press

At left, Brian Ratliff of ODFW talks about Sumpter's recent bear problem.

ODFW put out some traps and caught a bear the 24th in the Sawmill Gulch area. This particular animal had been in a fridge on a porch. The owner locked up the fridge and the frustrated bear threw it off the porch. The bear had to be euthanized. ODFW kept running traps in the City limits and caught two more bears.

On October 5th, a bear actually entered a residence, getting into a closed porch area with a door that wasn't too hard to open. After leaving the residence, the bear climbed all over the owner's car. ODFW put out a trap and caught a bear on the 6th. It turned out this was the same bear that had been shot in the bridge of the nose a month prior.

Ratliff said ODFW is not concerned with the bear that knocks over a garbage can and keeps going. A habituated bear is a concern, however. It will continue seeking out human food sources. These bears cannot be relocated as there is too much potential that they could walk into a camp or another place and hurt someone.

Ratliff said there have always been bears around Sumpter but this was an exceptional year for bear sightings. Sometimes, ODFW is able to address a specific source that is drawing bears in. That was not the case this year. Ratliff said if a bear tries to get into a fridge or freezer and is unsuccessful, chances are he will ignore them from that point on. If the bear tries and succeeds, all fridges and freezers will become a target. Ratliff said he has never seen a town with more porch fridges and freezers.

Ratliff suggested the City communicate with citizens about simple prevention

measures that can help head off future problems. These include putting garbage out the morning of pick up, storing fridges, freezers, and coolers in the garage if possible, and not storing pet food outside in garbage cans. Fruit trees can be protected with an electric fence. He recommended the site bearsmart.com for more practical information.

City Recorder Julie McKinney asked why the only bears trapped were males. Ratliff said he did not know. He would have expected to catch some younger females, but did not.

Myatt said there has been an exceptional bear problem all over Northeast Oregon and it would be interesting to look at the trends of males versus females.

Kurt Clarke asked if the bear population of Eastern Oregon is growing and what the estimated population is in a 10-mile radius of town. Myatt stated the population is static, but robust. It's hard to get a good count of the bear population. Ratliff explained the process and challenges of marking bears.

Ratliff said if Sumpter works on it now and can get a 60% response rate from citizens, he thinks the issue can be nipped in the bud. Though, "I'm sure you will have bears every few bears and occasionally we will have to come in and deal with them."

Young asked about wolves in the area. Ratliff said he wouldn't be surprised and that they are really good at covering country. He mentioned a lone male wolf hanging out in the North Fork of the John Day wilderness area who was collared. He traveled to the Bridge

Creek wildlife area, and recently made a big swing by Anthony Lakes, back by Crane Creek and then back to Bridge Creek. The winter before last, a group of collared wolves moved through Auburn. Ratliff said they could be anywhere. He likes to keep track of them, and encouraged anyone to call with reports of wolf sightings. The field office number is 541-523-5832.

Baker County Nuisance Ordinance Review

Council agreed to review Baker County's new nuisance ordinance, revised to have "more teeth" and discuss it at the next Council meeting.

Resolution 345: Move Budget Capacity to purchase Fire Tender

McKinney read the resolution to move budget capacity within the 2017/2018 general fund to accommodate purchase of a tender from Powder River Rural Fire Department, as approved by Council on 8/8, and to allow utilization of donations for purchasing large equipment to this purchase. Movement within the fund does not increase or decrease total funds. Council unanimously approved adoption of the resolution.

Public Input
Young presented Council a letter from the Sumpter Volunteers, who are putting together this year's Christmas celebration. They are planning to use the regular parade route and intend to honor Glen Wullf. Young said he was a parade regular and when he showed up they knew it was dark enough to start. Council unanimously approved holding the parade. It will take place December 9, along with the Christmas train and bazaar.

Wolf

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"The hunter, a 38-year-old male, from Clackamas, told the trooper he had been hunting elk alone, when he repeatedly noticed some type of animal moving around him. A short time later, the hunter observed three of what he assumed would be coyotes. He said at one point one of them began to run directly at him, while another made its way around him.

"The hunter stated he focused on the one running directly at him. He began to scream at it, and, fearing for his life, shot it one time. He said what he still believed to be a coyote died from the single shot. He stated that, after the shot, the other two disappeared out of sight.

"The hunter said he returned to his camp, and told fellow hunters what had occurred. He said he was still uncertain if what he shot was a coyote. He said they returned to the location, and came to the conclusion it was a wolf. The hunter then notified ODFW and OSP.

"Further investigation at the site of the shooting indicated the hunter was 27 yards from where he shot, and where the wolf died. The wolf was seized, and later released to ODFW for examination. The Union County District Attorney's Office was consulted regarding the investigation, and based upon the available evidence, the case will not be prosecuted, as this is believed to be an incidence of self-defense.

"It is unlawful to kill a wolf in Oregon, except in defense of human life (and in certain instances involving wolf depredation of livestock).

"According to ODFW, this incident marks the first time that a wolf has been reported shot in self-defense in Oregon since they began returning to the state in the late 1990s.

"ODFW examined the wolf shot, and determined it was an 83-pound female associated with the OR30 pair of wolves occupying the Starkey and Ukiah WMUs in northeast Oregon (Union and Umatilla Counties). Initial examination does not indicate that the wolf was a breeding female, but the wolf's DNA will be analyzed to confirm this.

"Dangerous encounters between wolves and people are rare, as are such encounters between people and cougars, bears and coyotes," said Roblyn Brown, ODFW Acting Wolf Coordinator. "They will usually avoid hunters, and leave the area when they see, hear, or smell people close by. If you see a wolf or any other animal, and are concerned about your safety, make sure it knows you are nearby, by talking or yelling, to alert it to your presence. If you are carrying a firearm, you can fire a warning shot into the ground."

According to ODFW, wolves weren't "reintroduced" to Oregon, but the ones currently here migrated from Idaho, or were born here. "Wolves were captured in Canada and released in central Idaho and Yellowstone National Park in the mid-1990s, but they were not released in Oregon. State wildlife managers have not captured wolves elsewhere and released them in Oregon, and there are no plans to do so," according to ODFW information.

In an email to *The Baker County Press*, on Wednesday, November 8, Oregon Wild Executive Director Sean Stevens said that Oregon Wild did receive the OSP report, case number SP17-393843, and several photos of the skinned wolf carcass from other sources, including KGW News (NBC, Channel 8). Since that time, Oregon Wild has received the same information from OSP, plus the OSP dash cam video (the body cam video had been redacted at that time, Stevens said).

Stevens said, "The photos of the exit and entry wounds do not seem to match up with the OSP report and the interview with the hunter. We are simply asking that the OSP reopen this case, and do a better job of explaining this discrepancy to the Oregon public."

According to Stevens, after the incident on Friday, October 27, ODFW obtained the carcass, skinned it on Monday, October 30, disposed of it, on Wednesday, November 1, and OSP and ODFW issued the press releases on Thursday, November 2.

He said, "Somewhere in that timeline, the Union County DA declined to bring charges. We have made a request to the DA to get more information on the investigation from the prosecutor's perspective, including the timeline. Other than the police report, it seems that OSP is remaining mum, despite the fact that the west's preeminent wolf biologist is calling into question their version of events, based on photographic evidence."

The wolf biologist referenced in the email, and in the letter to the Governor's Office, from Stevens and members of the other organizations, on Thursday, November 9, is retired U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Biologist Carter Niemeyer, who lives in Boise, Idaho, and who questioned the elk hunter's version of events, in an article by Eric Mortenson (the reference was to Mortenson's article on the subject for the Capital Press, on November 6, 2017. A duplicate of this article also appears for the *East Oregonian*, on the same date).

The letter stated, "We are writing to request that you direct the Oregon State Police...to reopen its investigation...A public records act request has revealed photographic evidence that directly contradicts OSP's official report of the incident. Therefore, we also request that the investigation be conducted with independent oversight from the Office of the Attorney General, and that the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife...be directed to fully cooperate...A failure to hold OSP accountable in this case could set a dangerous precedent, and send a message that Oregon will look the other way when it comes to illegally killing wolves and other wildlife..."
Niemeyer's argument is based on his experience with observations of general wolf behavior, and how he interpreted the photographic evidence, though he wasn't involved in the investigation.

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BMTD describes outages

TV channels operated by the Blue Mountain Translator District are undergoing a re-tuning process in order to vacate the 600 Mhz

frequency as a result of the Federal Communication Commission's March 2017 Incentive Auction. Viewers in Baker and Union Coun-

ties should expect irregular disruptions in service until November 27 when the District is scheduled to complete our channel

re-tuning operations. For more information, please contact the District at 541-963-0196 or bmt.d.org@gmail.com .

Call goes out to local artists

Crossroads Carnegie Art Center February Open Regional Show titled, "Places of the Heart" call to artists.

This year's Open show has been moved from April to February due to other show commitments and Crossroads is taking advantage of the situation!

Places of the Heart... not necessarily a place, but perhaps somewhere or something for which you feel a deep affection for or connection with; which can be a place or person you love, or something you love to do. Something or somewhere that gives you

calm, calls to your heart, gives you peace, allows you to be you, to breath... where we feel alive and love.

Accepting artwork:
Monday, January 29,
2018 9:00 a.m.-5:30 p.m.
Show opens: Friday,
February 2, 2018 5:30-8:00

p.m.

There will be a "People's Choice" award of \$100 to be selected during the opening reception.

For show details see the Crossroads website page, look under quick forms link for "Places of the Heart - Feb 2018"