

Man Arrested in Hatchery Break-In Kills 18,000 Salmon with Bleach

Gardiner, OR - A Gardiner man has been arrested in a burglary of the Gardiner, Reedsport, and Winchester Bay (GRWB) Salmon Trout Enhancement Program (STEP) hatchery.

The investigation began on Monday, April 22, 2024, when deputies were alerted that someone had forcibly made entry into the hatchery building. Once inside, the suspect had poured a chemical substance into one of the rearing ponds causing the death of approximately 18,000 smolt chinook salmon. Deputies processed the scene and began conducting a follow up investigation.

A container of bleach had been taken from a supply shed and emptied into a rearing tank with thousands of young, pre-smolt Chinook salmon. STEP president Deborah Yates told KLCC that a hatchery volunteer found the dead fish at feeding time, laying on the tank floor.

"Ironically, it was Earth Day," Yates said. "We were highly concerned that it was eco-terrorists."

On Tuesday, April 23, 2024, around 6:30 p.m., a deputy patrolling the area observed a male walking south along Highway 101 near milepost 210. A short time later the deputy walked into the hatchery and observed that same male behind the locked gate and no trespassing signs. The male, identified as 20-year-old Gardiner resident Joshua Alexander Heckathorn, was contacted and interviewed by the deputy. During the interview, Heckathorn admitted to trespassing on the property and entering a storage location and handling the chemical bottle on Monday.

Deputies arrested Heckathorn and lodged him at the Douglas County Jail on charges of Burglary II, Criminal Trespass and Criminal Mischief. Due to the number of smolt chinook salmon that were killed in the incident, the Sheriff's Office is collaborating with the Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife unit on the case.

"Solving this case is the result of collaboration and good policework," Sheriff John Hanlin remarked. "I am proud of the work done by the deputies and have full confidence that the investigation will aid in holding those responsible accountable for their actions."

The Sheriff's Office was also assisted by the Reedsport Police Department.

Body Recovered from the North Umpqua River

Idleld Park, OR - On April 19, 2024, Douglas County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue organized a large scale search in their ongoing efforts to locate 27-year-old Rachel Merchant-Ly of Idleld Park. Merchant-Ly was reported missing on Thursday, February 29, 2024, when she didn't arrive at Glide Elementary School where she worked as a kindergarten teacher. Later that morning, a Douglas County Sheriff's deputy located signs of a motor vehicle crash near milepost 41 on Highway 138E.

On Friday, March 1, 2024, Merchant-Ly's vehicle was recovered from the North Umpqua River, but she was not found inside. Since that time, searchers have conducted numerous searches by water, land, and air without success.

On April 19, 2024, searchers from Douglas County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue, Jackson County Search and Rescue and Lane County Search and Rescue organized to conduct further searching. Volunteer rafting groups and community members also organized and were coordinating with the Sheriff's Office efforts.

At approximately 9:30 a.m., a community member volunteer located a deceased body in the river approximately 7.5 miles downstream from the crash site. Deputies confirmed the presence of the body and began coordinating recovery efforts. The Douglas County Medical Examiner's Office responded and confirmed the body to be that of Rachel Merchant-Ly.

"I cannot thank the dedicated deputies, SAR Volunteers, agency partners and community members who have not given up on finding Rachel," Sheriff John Hanlin said. "Commissioner Freeman and I have been in personal communication with Rachel's husband, mother, father and extended family. They are extremely thankful for the efforts of everyone involved."

The Sheriff's Office was assisted throughout the investigation by Douglas County, Jackson County and Lane County Search and Rescue teams, the Oregon State Search and Rescue Coordinator, Oregon State Police, Oregon Department of Transportation, Pacific Power, Weekly Brothers, North Umpqua Outfitters, Northwest Rafters Association, Douglas County Fire District #2 and all of the community members who volunteered their time.

Man In Custody Dies at Mercy Medical Center

Roseburg, OR - An adult male who had been in custody at the Douglas County Jail died at Mercy Medical Center on Monday, April 15, 2024. Deputies in the jail found 33-year-old Derek Michael Ruh unconscious and unresponsive in his bunk. Deputies initiated resuscitative efforts and dialed 9-1-1 for an ambulance.

Once EMS arrived on scene, they took over lifesaving efforts and transported Ruh to Mercy Medical Center. Ruh was later pronounced deceased at the hospital.

The Douglas County Medical Examiner's Office is investigating the death. On Tuesday, April 16, 2024, an autopsy was conducted at the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office. Full toxicological screening is pending, but Ruh's death is suspected to be the results of a drug overdose.

Drug overdose deaths within the community have increased significantly over the past several years. Each overdose death is heartbreaking and has a profound impact on the lives lost and those who knew them.

"I send my deepest condolences to the family and friends of Mr. Ruh," Sheriff John Hanlin remarked.

Ruh had been taken into custody by the Roseburg Police Department on Sunday, April 14, 2024, shortly after 10:00 pm. He was being held at the Douglas County Jail on an arrest warrant out of Linn County.

Public Meeting Notice: Dog Control Board

Roseburg, OR - The Douglas County Dog Control Board will hold a meeting on Wednesday, April 17, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. at the Douglas County Courthouse, Room 216, located at 1036 SE Douglas Avenue, Roseburg, Oregon 97470. The agenda meeting agenda can be located at: www.dcsco.com/dogboard

In compliance with ORS 192.610 to 192.690, we will accommodate any member of the public who wishes to watch the meeting. To view the live stream or post meeting recording, please visit: <https://video.ibm.com/channel/douglascountyoregon>.

Please contact the Sheriff's Office located in Room 210 of the Justice Building at the Douglas County Courthouse, 1036 SE Douglas Ave. Roseburg, OR 97470 541-440-4449, if you need an accommodation.

Winston Woman Arrested for Animal Abuse/Neglect

Roseburg, OR - A Winston woman has been arrested on charges of animal abuse and neglect. Douglas County Sheriff's Office Animal Control deputies began an investigation early this week after receiving a tip of a horse that was reported to be mistreated at a property in the 600-block of Longhorn Lane. During the investigation, deputies learned the horse and property owner had no connection.

Deputies discovered a 3-year-old mixed breed horse, named Ace, who was found to be severely malnourished and in neglectful conditions. Ace's owner, 24-year-old Morgan Faith Fowler of Winston, surrendered the horse to deputies on Wednesday who took it to a veterinary hospital for examination and later to Strawberry Mountain Rescue and Rehabilitation Center. Overnight, Ace's condition declined to the point that euthanasia was necessary for humane care.

Deputies contacted Fowler Thursday afternoon and took her into custody for Animal Neglect I and Animal Abuse II. She was transported to the Douglas County Jail where she was booked on those charges.

"This is a very severe case of neglect and abuse," Sheriff John Hanlin said. "The Douglas County

Sheriff's Office is continuing its investigation and will provide all relevant facts to the Douglas County District Attorney's Office."

Anyone who may have information regarding this case is encouraged to contact the Douglas County Sheriff's Office at 541-440-4471 referencing case #24-1522.

Sheriff Hanlin expressed his thanks to Bailey Veterinary Clinic, Strawberry Mountain Rescue and Rehabilitation Center and to the deputies and volunteers who worked to save Ace and are now working on holding Fowler accountable. "These cases are never easy and I cannot thank those who have been involved enough," the Sheriff remarked.

Skier Rescued by DCS&R

Diamond Lake, OR - On Sunday, March 31, 2024, at approximately 1:30 p.m. Douglas County 9-1-1 dispatchers received a report of a 57-year-old woman who fell and injured her ankle while cross country skiing near Mt. Thielsen with her companion. The victim was unable to bear weight on the injured leg and requested assistance.

Deputies activated the Douglas County Search & Rescue team who responded to the area along with volunteers from Diamond Lake Resort. Searchers used snowshoes to hike the four miles into the base of a tree line where they located the victim, Trina Reiter of Eugene and her companion just before 7:45 p.m. Searchers stabilized Reiter's injury, placed her in a litter and transported her back to the trailhead. They arrived at the trailhead shortly before 1:30 a.m., to a waiting ambulance. Reiter was evaluated by EMS at the scene and went to the hospital by private vehicle.

"This mission shows the dedication of our search and rescue deputies and volunteers who spent their Easter Sunday assisting someone in our community who was in need of their services," Lt. Brad O'Dell said. "This mission was very successful and Trina was extremely thankful for the care and compassion shown to her by Douglas County SAR and Diamond Lake Resort volunteers."

Douglas County SAR is a division of the Douglas County Sheriff's Office with approximately 90 active volunteers and two full-time Search and Rescue Deputies.

Suspect Arrested after Assaulting Roommate and Deputies

Eugene, OR - On April 25th, 2024, Lane County Sheriff's deputies responded to the report of an assault that had just occurred at an adult foster care facility in the 90700blk of Prairie Rd. in Eugene. Deputies learned that a resident, 46-year-old Levi Nelson, was being violent with other residents and had intentionally struck another resident in the face.

Upon arrival, deputies attempted to speak with Nelson at which time he tried to grab one of the deputy's tasers from her duty belt. The deputy took hold of his arm at which time he pulled away and then began striking her in the head/neck area with a closed fist. Nelson grabbed hold of another deputy's holstered firearm as they struggled to get him under control. Deputies were able to eventually overpower Nelson and get him into custody without any serious injuries being sustained by any of the involved parties.

Nelson was transported and lodged at the Lane County Jail on charges including Physical Harassment and two counts of Assault on a Public Safety Officer. LCSO Case #24-2123

Murder Suspect Arrested in California

Mendocino, CA - Early in the morning of April 25th, the Lane County Sheriff's

Office was advised by the Mendocino County Sheriff's Office in California that they arrested 49-year-old John Jay Kelley of Eugene on a warrant for Murder in the Second Degree. He was arrested without incident and the involved vehicle a silver 2008 Mitsubishi Outlander SUV bearing Oregon license plate #532PMQ, was recovered. Kelley is being held pending extradition to Oregon.

LCSO would like to thank the Oregon State Police, Mendocino County Sheriff's Office, and many other partners who assisted on this case.

On April 24th 2024, the Lane County Sheriff's Office responded to the report of a deceased adult female at a residence in the 28000 block of Hwy. 36 south of Junction City. Upon arrival, investigators observed the deceased had suspicious injuries that may have contributed to her death.

The Lane County Sheriff's Office was looking for Kelley, a person of interest at this time. Kelley was considered armed and dangerous and a warrant was issued. UPDATE - Suspect arrested for murder in California. LCSO Case #24-2110.

Man Arrested After Dispute for Assault/Death

Eugene, OR - On April 24th at about 3 p.m., deputies responded to reports of a dispute with shots fired in the 1000 block of Cinnamon Avenue, Eugene. Eugene Police officers in the area responded with Lane County Sheriff's Deputies. A female was located at that scene with a gunshot wound. Investigators were quickly able to determine the identity of the suspect and located his vehicle in the 1000 block of Abbie Lane. Eugene Police SWAT responded and assisted in apprehending the suspect.

The female victim in this case passed away from her injuries. Her identity is being withheld at this time. Detectives identified the suspect as Izyk Paul Bartlett, 20, of Eugene. He was lodged in the Lane County Jail this evening on charges of Manslaughter in the First Degree, Assault in the Second Degree, and Felon in Possession of a Firearm. The investigation is ongoing.

The Lane County Sheriff's Office would like to thank the Eugene Police Department, Coburg Police Department, Junction City Police Department, and Oregon State Police for their assistance on this case. LCSO Case #24-2113.

Motorcyclist Fatality

Douglas County, OR - On Saturday, April 6, 2024, at approximately 5:26 p.m., Oregon State Police responded to a single-vehicle crash on Hwy. 38 near milepost 30.5 in Douglas County.

The preliminary investigation indicated that a Harley Davidson motorcycle was traveling eastbound when the operator lost control while negotiating a curve. The motorcycle struck the guardrail before coming to an uncontrolled rest in the westbound lane of travel. Multiple motorists stopped and rendered first aid prior to the arrival of emergency services.

The motorcycle operator, Christopher Rein Schuerger (40) of Springfield, was pronounced deceased at the scene despite life-saving measures by a responding trooper and good Samaritans. Speed and wet roadway conditions contributed to the crash.

OSP was assisted by the Douglas County Sheriff's Office, Douglas County Medical Examiner's Office, North Douglas Ambulance, Elkton Fire Department, and the Oregon Department of Transportation.

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