

Troopers Foiling Thermal Imaging Poachers

Clackamas County OR – High-tech poaching emerged in Oregon when officials served search warrants on nine Clackamas County residences on Dec. 15 and 16.

Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife (OSPF&W) Troopers arrested 13 individuals and seized 14 infrared thermal imaging devices, one rifle and four deer in an operation that followed months of investigation into the subjects' use of Forward-Looking Infrared, or FLIR, to illegally kill deer, elk and other big game animals.

Laws prohibit the use of thermal and infrared devices to hunt, locate, or scout for wildlife because the heat-sensing technology undermines an animal's natural ability to hide or conceal itself. FLIR users can spot an animal's heat signature in complete darkness or heavy cover. Without camouflage or cover, animals are unable to forage or move around after dark.

Over the last two years, OSP F&W Division has received an increasing number of complaints regarding the unlawful use of FLIR technology to hunt or scout for big game animals. Several complaints originated in the Clackamas County area.

This fall, F&W Troopers began investigating several individuals who were reportedly using infrared technology to kill deer and elk in a specific area. Troopers were successful and the result underscores officials' ability to navigate evolving technology, according to OSP Captain Kyle Kennedy.

"This case highlights the Fish and Wildlife Division's ability to adapt to modern poaching threats and effectively investigate

and seek criminal prosecution of poachers," he said.

Infrared technology gives advantage to those using it, and can result in an increase in the number of animals taken off the landscape, according to Jason Kirchner, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) District Wildlife Biologist based in Newport. "Thermal or infrared use is illegal in Oregon, gives an unfair advantage, and is not a fair chase," he said, "This illegal activity will increase harvest rates, reduce our game populations and hunting opportunities, and impact the public image of law-abiding hunters."

Bernadette Graham-Hudson, ODFW Wildlife Division Administrator, agrees.

"Hunting regulations are in place to level the playing field for all hunters, and to maintain fair chase standards," she said, "People who bypass the rules steal from legitimate hunters, and all Oregonians who wish to experience our wildlife as they recreate in the outdoors."

The Oregon Hunters Association, a statewide organization invested in protecting Oregon's natural resources, backs the effort to curb unethical practices, according to state President, Steve Hagan.

"OHA supports the vigorous enforcement of laws designed to protect wildlife, habitat, private property and hunter's rights," Hagan said.

Officials will file criminal wildlife charges with the Clackamas County District Attorney's Office for all 13 individuals suspected of using infrared thermal imaging while scouting or hunting big game animals.

Elk Creek Watershed

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and others, who managed a great deal of work over a long period, ending last year.

When Paula Estill contacted me recently to let me know the Elk Creek Watershed Coalition was forming to continue the good work, I was really encouraged. Oregon has a system of watershed management procedures that are major source of land improvements and management that provides resourceful help for landowners and wildlife and environmental concerns. The ECWC has done over 2 million dollars in land improvements since 2005. There is a lot work that can still be done. Elk Creek has some of the best Coho in the region and the low gradient waterways are primed to be first rate habitat.

Along with Paula and Avi Zohar, Lee has committed to help in his very capable way and Susan Applegate returns with her enthusiasm along with RuthAnn Duncan filling the chairperson role. The meeting will help determine the momentum and direction the watershed takes for environmental and habitat improvement and helping property owners steward their resources for sustainability as well as administratively setting up an effective organization.

The meeting is on Tuesday January 14th in the Drain Civic Center, 205 West "A" St, in the Conference room at 7pm. The Coalition is actively looking for new members. Open to all interested parties, the coalition is seeking diverse individuals, interested in fisheries, habitat restoration and responsible property management. Welcome all who are interested in the Elk Creek Watershed area.

Oregon News Herald Kidnapping Reported Firearm involved in Cottage Grove Abduction

Cottage Grove, OR -- On 01/01/2025 at about 12:07 AM South Lane 9-1-1 received a report of a suspected kidnapping that had just occurred at El Tapatio Restaurant located at 725 E. Gibbs Ave. in Cottage Grove. Cottage Grove Police Officers were nearby and responded immediately to the location where they contacted witnesses to the incident.

During the subsequent investigation it was reported to officers that Austin K. Waskiewicz was observed confronting his girlfriend at the south entrance to the restaurant while brandishing a firearm and demanded that she come with him. After a brief argument the two left the restaurant together in their vehicle and returned to their residence at 40 Sweet Ln. in Cottage Grove. Officers were able to confirm the location of the residence and the presence of the vehicle described by witnesses parked in front of the house.

Due to the volatile nature of the incident and the involvement of a firearm, the Eugene Police Department was contacted to request mutual aid. The Eugene Police Department SWAT team responded to assist in the resolution of the incident.

At about 8:30 AM, Waszkiewicz was taken into custody by SWAT team members at the residence without incident. The SWAT team transferred

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Bird Flu a Growing concern in Oregon and World Wide

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hospitalized with serious respiratory symptoms, is believed to have contracted bird flu from exposure to sick and dead birds in a backyard flock. The patient has not been identified but is reportedly over 65 with underlying health problems and is the second person in the United States who has been hospitalized with the virus. The Louisiana patient was infected with a strain of the virus different from the one affecting dairy cows and causing sporadic cases in farmworkers in the U.S.

Genetic analysis of two samples collected from the Louisiana patient suggest that the virus may have the ability to attach to cells in the human upper airway. That's worrisome, experts say, because bird flu viruses like H5N1 typically attach to cell receptors found in birds and other animals, but not commonly in humans. This is why bird flu typically doesn't infect humans or spread person to person. One of the mutations was also seen in a sample from a British Columbia teenager who was hospitalized with bird flu, the CDC said.

While the findings show that the virus has the capacity to mutate in ways that could make it more transmissible to humans, experts stopped short of suggesting it's on the verge of a pandemic.

"There's no evidence that there's been spread from this person to others, and that's a good thing," said Dr. William Schaffner, an infectious diseases expert at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. "It clearly means that we have to keep our attention on this, and if anything, ratchet it up even more."

Dr. Paul Offit, a vaccine and infectious disease expert at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, said there's no evidence the mutations were "functional," meaning the virus could actually attach to the upper airway and replicate and spread to others.

"I think if there were clear and definitive evidence that the virus has mutated to the point that it can bind to the binding receptors in the upper respiratory tract, meaning the lining of the nose, the lining of the throat, the lining of the windpipe and therefore reproduce itself

in the upper respiratory tract, that would be worrisome," Offit said. "But that's not what the report said."

In the report, the CDC said the detection "underscores the importance of ongoing genomic surveillance in people and animals, containment of avian influenza A(H5) outbreaks in dairy cattle and poultry, and prevention measures among people with exposure to infected animals or environments."

The agency said that the risk to the general public hasn't changed and remains low. As of the end of 2024, 66 confirmed human cases of H5N1 have been reported in the U.S., with the majority linked to exposure to infected poultry or dairy cows, according to the CDC. That number is likely an underestimate, however, as a CDC report published in November found evidence of asymptomatic bird flu infections in farmworkers. There is no evidence of person-to-person spread associated with any of the cases.

The Louisiana patient was infected with a strain called D1.1, which is closely related to other viruses recently detected in wild birds and poultry in the U.S. and in recent human cases in British Columbia, Canada and Washington state.

The CDC said its analysis found no changes associated with markers that would mean antivirals, such as Tamflu, wouldn't work against the virus. That's one of the agency's criteria for deploying a bird flu vaccine.

Angela Rasmussen, a virologist who specializes in emerging infectious diseases, noted on the social media platform X that the mutations identified in the patient weren't present in samples from birds, indicating the changes developed within the patient after infection and aren't circulating in wildlife.

She said that's "good news" because "it reduces risk of transmission to another person and suggests 'human-adapted' viruses aren't emerging in birds." But, "the H5N1 situation remains grim" as human cases continue to rise, Rasmussen posted.

"We don't know what combination of mutations would lead to a pandemic H5N1

virus and there's only so much we can predict from these sequence data," she said. "But the more humans are infected, the more chances a pandemic virus will emerge."

Oregon state veterinarian Dr. Ryan Scholz says health officials are still trying to connect the dots after an indoor house cat in Washington County contracted bird flu after eating cat food with raw turkey, and later died.

Since bird flu was first found in the U.S. in dairy cattle in March, dozens of cats have contracted the virus, primarily through poultry or wild bird exposure. The Oregon Department of Agriculture says Oregon's first cat to catch the illness died after eating a frozen feline turkey meal from pet food company, Northwest Naturals.

"Anytime you have a raw food product, if there is a pathogen, there isn't a chance to kill that pathogen and so it does pass through," said Scholz.

Cat owners who may have bought the product are being asked to throw out meals with "Best by" sell dates of May 21 and June 23, 2026.

"We have not connected any other products from that company to the source meat that we believe was infected in this product, and so there really is not a widespread recall," said Scholz. "It really is targeted to just those two lots of this product."

Scholz says when the virus is contracted through food products, it's usually through raw dairy products.

"We don't have this virus in dairy cattle in Oregon, but we do know that several neighboring states do have it or have had it and particularly in California, we're seeing this in raw milk dairies, so raw, unpasteurized dairy products are another big risk factor right now," Scholz said.

Scholz says symptoms of bird flu in cats are mostly neurological. They can include lethargy, depression, and refusing to eat.

"We have seen blindness reported a number of times where the cats become either temporarily or permanently blind and then just kind of generally go downhill very quickly,"

he said.

Scholz says bird flu spreading through different species is rare. The first human in Oregon tested positive in November. He says there are other things you can do to limit exposure.

"If you do have birds that unexpectedly die, make sure you're taking some basic precautions like wearing gloves, wearing an N95 mask, wearing goggles when you handle that bird, and if you have concerns, call us."

The Oregon Department of Agriculture has a hotline you can call to report a dead bird. You can reach them at 503-986-4711 or through email at AHHotline@oda.oregon.gov. If your pet is displaying any symptoms of the virus, you're asked to contact your veterinarian.

A second brand of raw pet food sold in farmers markets in California has been found to contain bird flu, according to Los Angeles County health officials. One house cats was has been confirmed positive with the virus, and the four cats living in the same house are presumed to be sick, as well.

Last week health officials alerted consumers about a separate brand of raw pet food linked to the death of a cat in Oregon.

The most recent cases involve a brand called Monarch Raw Pet Food, LA County officials said in a press release in late December. A list of locations where the raw pet food was sold was listed on the product website.

Health officials in L.A. warned against feeding pets raw food following the detection of bird flu in a raw pet food brand last week. Earlier this month, officials confirmed bird flu in four house cats in another household. They consumed raw milk, became sick and died, officials said.

Cats infected with H5N1 bird flu can develop severe illness that can include neurologic signs, respiratory signs or liver disease that can rapidly lead to death. There have been no human cases of bird flu associated with house cats, L.A. officials said. Health officials say the overall risk of H5N1 bird flu to the public remains low.

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