

Eugene and Springfield will soon have new AI-powered license plate readers that will make ‘digital fingerprints’ of cars

Story by Rusty Savage



Eugene and Springfield police have purchased license plate readers that use AI to make digital fingerprints of vehicles. Police say they're a tool to gather objective evidence and they've already helped solve a violent crime.

The cameras consist of small black devices powered with solar panels and use AI to capture make, model, color, unique characteristics like damage or bumper stickers, as well as license plate numbers. According to the company, it can also make digital fingerprints of bicycles.

The data will go into a searchable database maintained by Georgia-based Flock Safety for 30 days. Flock Safety now has contracts with Eugene and Springfield Police Departments, as well as law enforcement agencies and homeowners

associations around the country. Flock is still in the process of installing Eugene's 57 cameras, but EPD has already used the system to apprehend suspects in two crimes; a robbery and a double homicide.

According to the company's terms of use policy, local governments own the data they collect and are also in charge of deciding who has access. Skinner said Eugene may look up specific vehicles on behalf of other departments or agencies, but it won't allow direct access. But privacy advocates fear the system, linked to a nationwide network, may put Oregon's vulnerable residents at risk.

A recent investigation from 404 Media found Immigration and Customs Enforcement had gained access to Flock data from across the country with the help of local police departments. They reported

that a sheriff's department in Texas used Flock's network of cameras in trying to locate a woman who had an abortion.

Eugene, and police departments across Oregon are looking into the technology, which may expose information about marginalized visitors and residents if they join Flock's network. Even with restrictions on database access, partnerships with previously trusted federal agencies, like the FBI, could result in Flock data being used to enforce laws contrary to Oregon's values.

Both Eugene and Springfield accessed the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission Organized Retail Theft Grants to purchase the cameras. EPD states that Eugene's cameras were primarily purchased to deal with retail theft, but police may use them for Amber Alerts and violent crime. The department also says there are no plans to use them for traffic enforcement, and they'll be located

on major thoroughfares. Eugene Police's Flock Camera system will fully launch in July.

Springfield PD bought 25 cameras that will be rolled out over the next few months. Springfield Police Lt. George Crolly said the cameras will be used for retail theft investigations, stolen vehicles, major crimes and Amber Alerts. He said the department will follow Oregon's Sanctuary Promise Act, which bars law enforcement from helping with immigration enforcement. Springfield has, reportedly, bought 24 regular Flock cameras and one that can detect speed.

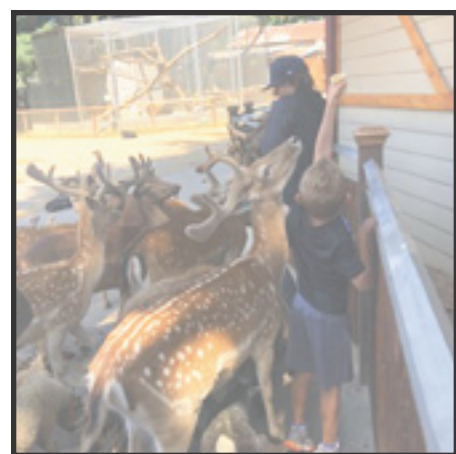
The Lane County Sheriff said the department is considering whether to purchase Flock cameras, but has not yet made a decision. Other cities across the region, including Oregon City and Florence, have started rolling out the system over the last year. Flock also sells its systems to private businesses, including some in Oregon.



Solar-powered, AI enabled security cameras like this one are appearing in Eugene and Springfield after the two cities signed a contract with the surveillance company Flock Safety.

West Coast Game Park Safari Investigation finds Guns, Drugs, \$1.6 million in cash; Owner arrested

Story by Rusty Savage



The West Coast Game Park Safari in Bandon, Oregon, often referred to as a "safari park" and featured animals like tigers and lions, has been closed after a criminal investigation and the seizure of over 300 animals. Oregon State Police, along with local, state, and federal agencies, conducted a lengthy criminal investigation involving animal welfare and business practices. The park was closed after the investigation, and the seized animals were relocated. 310 animals were seized and relocated to sanctuaries and rescue facilities, according to the Oregon State Police.

The search warrant revealed concerning conditions at the park, including a dead tiger found in a freezer, thin animals with visible bones, and a lioness in a small, poorly ventilated den. Three animals were euthanized due to their poor physical condition. Coos County officials are still reviewing the case and determining if further charges related to animal welfare will be filed.

During the search, authorities also found 44 firearms, about 80 grams of methamphetamine, and about \$1.6 million in cash. The owner, Brian Tenney, was arrested on drug charges.

The primary focus of authorities after the closure has been transporting the seized animals to new homes.

The West Coast Game Park Safari opened in 1968 and has been a popular family experience to thousands of visitors. In recent years it has declined in its animal maintenance and general appearance. Online reviews from prior to the closure indicated mixed opinions about the park, with some enjoying the interactive animal encounters but others expressing concerns about the animals'

welfare and living conditions.

While the West Coast Game Park Safari is no longer operational, there are other attractions in the Bandon area, such as the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge, which offers opportunities to observe wildlife. However, this facility does not offer interactions or animal encounters in the same way the game park did.

The investigation and closure of West Coast Game Park Safari brought attention to the need for stricter oversight and enforcement of animal welfare laws in Oregon. Advocates for animal rights are calling for changes in state laws to make it easier for local authorities to enforce animal welfare regulations at facilities like West Coast Game Park Safari.

Organizations like the American Zoological Association (AZA) and Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS) are urging the public to visit only accredited facilities to ensure high standards of animal care. Only three are AZA certified in Oregon: Oregon Coast Aquarium, Newport Accredited through March 2027. Oregon Zoo, Portland Accredited through September 2026. Wildlife Safari, Winston Accredited through September 2026.

