

# Governor signs wolf-delisting bill

Environmentalists had hoped for a veto

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Bureau

A bill that averts an environmentalist lawsuit by ratifying the removal of wolves from Oregon's list of endangered species has been signed by Gov. Kate Brown.

Oregon wildlife regulators found that wolf populations have recovered enough to delist the species last year, which prompted three environmental groups — Cascadia Wildlands, Oregon Wild and the Center for Biological Diversity — to petition the Oregon Court of Appeals to overturn the decision.

House Bill 4040, which holds that the delisting process complied with the law, was approved by Oregon lawmakers during the 2016 legislative session and effectively voided the environmentalists' argument that the decision was illegal.

Brown signed HB 4040 on March 15 over the objections of environmentalists, who urged her to veto the bill, arguing the Legislature shouldn't have interfered with a judicial review of the wolf delisting that they had sought.



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife/AP  
A female wolf is pictured from the Minam pack outside La Grande, after it was fitted with a tracking collar.

# Boneyard Ridge will be preserved

By R.J. MARX  
The Daily Astorian

A critical 360-acre land parcel on Tillamook Head will be transferred from timber property to conservation corridor.

The North Coast Land Conservancy and Greenwood Resources signed a sales agreement Monday for Boneyard Ridge on Tillamook Head for \$1.3 million. The purchase will create 3,500 connected acres from the summit of Tillamook Head to the Necanicum River Valley.

"This agreement as of Monday is a full purchase agreement," North Coast Land Conservancy Executive Director Katie Voelke said. "Not only are all parties in, but we know what the cost will be, we've agreed on it, and we know what the closing date will be."

Boneyard Ridge will serve

as a link between Ecola State Park, which stretches along the Tillamook Head shoreline, and the land conservancy's Circle Creek Habitat Reserve in the Necanicum River floodplain west of U.S. Highway 101 at the south end of Seaside.

The site's dramatic name came from the discovery of elk bones by hunters on the property.

The conservancy's goal is to allow the land to mature into a complex rainforest of the kind that once characterized headlands along the Oregon Coast.

The sale was stalled after ownership shifted from Campbell Global to Greenwood Resources, Voelke said.

"It had to go through a whole process again of review, approving it, looking at it against company goals," Voelke said. "That added a whole new layer to it."

# Murder plotter gets sentenced to 20 years in prison

Appeal likely in case that roiled rural community

By NATALIE ST. JOHN  
EO Media Group

CATHLAMET, Wash. — Former Altoona resident Samuel Fredrick Valdez has been sentenced to spend 250 months — about 20 years — in a state prison.

Valdez, 64, was convicted in late February of solicitation to commit murder, arson, marijuana delivery and marijuana possession with intent to manufacture or deliver.

During the Monday afternoon sentencing hearing in Wahkiakum County Superior Court, visiting Cowlitz County Superior Court Judge Stephen Warning acknowledged that given his age, Valdez might well spend the rest of his life in a cell. Warning said he took that seriously, but decided to not to give the minimum sentence after considering the facts of the arson case — the jury had unanimously agreed that in July 2014, Valdez started a devastating fire at the home of his neighbors, Fred and Kathy Cantrell, while they were still inside.

"For vanishingly small reasons you decided to set fire to a house in which there were two elderly people, one of them blind," Warning said.

## 'A victim of my success'

During the trial, Wahkiakum County Deputy Prosecutor Sue Bauer argued that Valdez was so vindictive that he plotted to hire a hit man to murder his ex-wife, Elizabeth Robbins, last summer. His defense attorney, Wayne Fricke, said the state's case was built on testimony from a highly unreliable confidential informant who aimed to steal Valdez's profitable drug business.

Valdez admits he manufactured large quantities of

marijuana oil at his home on Altoona-Pillar Rock Road, but he still maintains that he is innocent of the more serious arson and solicitation charges.

"Yes, I got involved in this equipment and I was quite excited about it ...," Valdez told the packed courtroom on Monday. "Yes, I am a victim of my success."

Though he wore street clothes during his trial, Valdez attended the hearing in the bright orange sweat suit uniform of the Wahkiakum County Jail, where he has been incarcerated since his arrest last July. He appeared tired and frail, and struggled at times to manage the shackles on his wrists and ankles.

Valdez's sentence was based primarily on the solicitation charge, which is considered to be one of the most serious violent offenses in the state of Washington.

## 'Lived in fear'

Bauer invited Kathy Cantrell to read statements that she and her husband had written.

Cantrell said the fire had "changed everything." The couple lost virtually all of their property, as well as two dogs.

"Since that night, I have lived in fear of him returning to finish us off," Cantrell said.

She described the episodes of sudden panic that haunted her after the fire, her fear for her husband, who is blind, and her reluctance to invite her grandchildren to visit in the months between the fire and Valdez's arrest.

Fred Cantrell said that being blind made it all the more horrifying when he was awakened by the sound of an explosion on the night of the fire.

"I ran down the halls crashing into walls in my terror to save my fiancé Kathy," Cantrell wrote. He said he had also lived in constant fear that Valdez would "return to wreak havoc," if set free.

Bauer told Judge Warn-



Natalie St. John/EO Media Group  
Family members and attorney Wayne Fricke (second from left) watched as Sam Valdez completed sentencing paperwork in the Wahkiakum County Superior Court on Monday.

ing that Valdez had likely engaged in criminal conduct beyond what was covered in the trial, and had involved "friends, neighbors, friends of friends."

"If the defendant had sold (the marijuana oil) that was in his house by the gram, he could have made \$243,000 dollars. That is substantial," Bauer said. "It wasn't the first time he had delivered. It probably wasn't even the last time."

Bauer said she thought Valdez was capable of further victimizing his former friends and neighbors, if he were to be released.

"It's basic safety. There isn't anything that's going to teach him anything," Bauer said. "I think the community deserves to be safe from this man for the maximum amount."

In his brief remarks, Fricke said Valdez deserved the minimum sentence because he had never been in trouble with the

law before, and never intended to follow through with the shocking, violent fantasies he shared with the confidential informant in three secretly recorded conversations.

"It's a situation where there's a lot of vitriol in his remarks, a lot of stuff that looks bad ... but we're not here to sentence because he called a certain person names or because he was petty," Fricke said.

## 'My heart has been broken'

When it was his turn to speak, Valdez stood and faced the roughly 25 members of the public who attended the hearing. His anger with Bauer was evident, as he repeatedly

invoked her name in an emotional speech.

"I've listened to Miss Bauer ripping me apart," Valdez said. "It's tearing my heart out." He described good deeds he had done for neighbors and strangers, and insisted that he had been set up.

"The CI is a con. He's coned this court, he's coned Miss Bauer, and he's coned me. I've never threatened or hurt anybody in my life."

Valdez concluded, "My heart has been broken."

## Convicted by his own words

Warning said some parts of the incriminating recorded conversations between Valdez and the informant were

so dramatic that they were hard to take seriously.

"It had a kind of juvenile quality to it. It was like listening to two 13-year-olds," Warning said. Despite his doubts about the informant's credibility, Warning thought Valdez's own statements and testimony had sealed his fate.

"You didn't get convicted based on what CI said. You got convicted based on what you said," Warning told him. "There's no doubt about that in my mind."

At the end of the hearing, Valdez was not allowed to touch or talk to his mother, girlfriend, or other supporters who watched in silence from the front row.

"I'll see you guys later," he mouthed, as the bailiff led him away.

Outside the courthouse, his mother, Laurel Valdez, said she thought the sentence was too harsh, and that she did not feel her son could have received a fair trial in his own county.

Valdez's ex-wife, Elizabeth Robbins, said she was disappointed that he didn't receive the maximum sentence.

She said that she and her former Altoona neighbors had feared for their lives before his arrest, and would fear for them again if he were ever to be released.

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