



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

A good Samaritan helps suppress a small brush fire on the side of U.S. Highway 30 just outside of Knappa on Friday afternoon.

Two small fires scorch Knappa

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

Two small fires in Knappa, one that burned the inside of a home and the other on the westbound side of U.S. Highway 30, kept firefighters busy Friday afternoon.

The first, at a small home on Knappa Platt Road, was reported after 1 p.m. Knappa Fire and one Astoria Fire engine responded and were able to contain the blaze.

Less than an hour later, a small brush fire with flames about 2 to 3 feet high started on the highway just a few miles west. The Oregon Department of Forestry's Astoria District put out the fire within a few minutes.

Liz Muniz, who lives near the site of the brush fire, said she heard the fire crackle while she was in her backyard. She also saw the



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Firefighters quickly contained a blaze on Knappa Platt Road Friday afternoon that gutted a small structure. No injuries were reported.

flames, which brought back unpleasant memories of a wildfire she experienced in 2015 when she was living in Northern California.

"It scared me half to death," Muniz said. "I moved here to get away from that."

Business uses beetles to clean flesh off of hunting trophies

Like the plot of a horror movie

By RAELYNN RICARTE
The Dalles Chronicle

LYLE, Wash. — The idea of beetles stripping flesh from bones sounds like the plot of a horror movie but, in the case of a Lyle business, it is how beautiful pieces of art are created.

"They do not bite humans, they do not carry diseases and they are not invasive," said Ken Hansen, owner of Kodiak Bones & Bugs Taxidermy.

He is known as the "bug guy" because he keeps 400,000 beetles in a shop that is far enough away from the house to keep his wife, Debbie, happy.

Since she is also a biologist, Hansen's wife doesn't mind the postal deliveries of animal skulls, or being in the presence of so many insects. It is the smell of decay that she wants to keep away.

"This process doesn't smell as bad as you might think it would, but it has brought grown men to their knees — some people have a problem with it and some don't," Hansen said.

Gleaming white skulls, including a huge one from a Kodiak brown bear, line shelves in the shop and several are prominently displayed in the Hansen home.

On their coffee table is a polar bear skull that Hansen brought from Kodiak, Alaska, where he started the business. He is currently processing a polar bear skeleton for the North Slope Borough in Nome.

Bare skulls, known as "European mounts" have become a conversation piece for visitors curious about Ken's unusual retirement profession.

"It's so out there, it's so different — I'm not doing this for the money, I enjoy it," he said.



Mark B. Gibson/The Dalles Chronicle

Ken Hansen, owner of Kodiak Bones & Bugs Taxidermy, stirs through the bedding mixture in a tray containing hundreds of the flesh-eating beetles to expose the beetles and larva he uses to clean the flesh from animal skulls in his workshop near Lyle, Wash.

"The beetles do the heavy lifting and I don't need to charge you a lot of money to give you a nice trophy."

The cost of preparing smaller game animals is \$125 and increases by \$50 for larger game.

Selling beetles to start new colonies is where the money is at, said Hansen.

Customers can order 5,000 beetles for \$450, 1,000 for \$125 or 300 for \$60. He throws in 30 to 40 percent "extras" just to be sure of the quantity when he fills orders.

Cleaning process

The beauty of having a skeleton cleaned by beetles is that the exterior isn't marred by tools used to remove the meat. Nor is it boiled, which loosens sutures, cracks teeth and destroys the delicate inner bones of the nasal structure, which Hansen believes is an integral part of the animal.

"The European mount is growing in popularity because it keeps the skull authentic and makes it a nice show piece," he said.

The Dermestid beetles owned by Hansen are a spe-

cialized species that eat only cold, dead flesh. The bugs are frequently fed pikeminnow, a predator fish that federal agencies pay to get out of the Columbia River, and the colony consumes about 20 pounds a week.

Hansen said the beetles prefer drier meats, so freezer burned meals are ideal. He also feeds them butcher scraps or hunting waste.

"They also like hot dogs, that seems to be a favorite," he said.

The bugs are divided among 80 trays — there are about 5,000 in each — and burrowed into Styrofoam, wood shavings and skeletal dust from their meals.

"They are feeding and chugging along," said Hansen.

He said beetle larvae, which look like small centipedes, clean the skulls and 1,000 larvae can remove all

traces of meat from a deer skull in about 10 days.

"They are very surgical," he said.

He said the beetles are used in museum and university collections around the world because they are so fastidious in their work.

However, the cleaning process can get interrupted occasionally because the beetles stop eating for 10 days to two weeks.

"No one really knows why they do this, I've done a lot of research but nobody seems to know why," said Hansen, who has learned to just wait for their appetite to return.

Finishing work

Once the beetles finish cleaning, Hansen takes over. He submerges the skull in Dawn detergent in warm water to pull the grease out of the bone. He changes the water frequently over a couple of months.

When the skull is oil-free, he soaks it in hydrogen peroxide and briefly puts it in the sun to bleach. By the time he sends the skeleton back to customers, the smell of decay is completely gone.

Although Hansen once worked alone, he has gotten busy enough raising beetles and shipping them to customers around the world that he has partnered with Tim Louge, an avid hunter from The Dalles, for the finishing process.

"I do 40 to 50 a season and require that people send, or turn them over to me, with no hide because the beetles don't like hair (or feathers)," he said.

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