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## Forestry Department wants more money to fight wildfires

By CLAUDE WITTHYCOMBE  
Capital Bureau

SILVERTON — Oregon's forestry department may ask legislators in the upcoming session for more money to deal with escalating wildfires.

State Forester Peter Daugherty told the Board of Forestry Wednesday that there is "big interest" in the Legislature in addressing fire policy, particularly when it comes to fires on Oregon's federal land.

"They all want to do something, and I don't know quite what it is they want to do," Daugherty said. "But they have created a fire caucus, and there will be a fire policy discussion at their next legislative session."

The timing may be right for the forestry department to make its case to legislators. While Oregon's rural communities consistently see fire's effects up close, the state's major cities got a dose of smoke and ash from wildfires this summer.

The Eagle Creek Fire, which began in early September and is still burning on the scenic Columbia River Gorge east of Portland, caused particular distress. And this week, more than 20 people have died as a result of wildfires in California wine country.

Gov. Kate Brown was also "very engaged" in fire issues, Daugherty said.

Brown has convened a council to hasten the economic recovery from wildfires that scorched communities from Mosier to Brookings.

Fire protection makes up a good share of the agency's costs.

The Oregon Department of Forestry estimates that the fire season has cost it \$38.9 million so far.

Recent fire seasons have also put a strain on employees — a problem that was documented by state auditors last year.

When fire season hits, all divisions of the department help handle the workload.

"We were in all-hands-on-deck mode from the (Aug. 21 total solar) eclipse until just recently," Daugherty said.

Harsh fire seasons and low timber revenues have

plagued the agency's state forests division and, as of April, that division of the agency was expected to go into the red in 2022.

Daugherty noted that the agency could also work to strengthen relationships with landowners, cooperation with other government agencies and remind the public of the link between forest management and fire.

Board member Cindy Deacon Williams, of Medford, argued that the wildfire situation may require more proactive measures to increase resilience on forestlands.

"If we don't figure out a way to engage with it proactively ahead of the time, we will as an agency do nothing but rob Peter to pay fire," said Williams. "With both funding and people, and energy, and effort, and talent, and the way the trends are going, there's no way we can win that battle if that's all we do."

Daugherty expressed concern that this year's fire season could stir up old tensions about fire policy and forest management.

"I think our real challenge will be to redirect these divisive conversations to a more productive conversation, where we can actually make progress by finding common ground," Daugherty said.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

# 'They were doing it to kill'

Poachers went after elk, bears and bobcats

By ANDREW THEEN  
The Oregonian

In the early morning hours of Nov. 30, a trail camera hidden along a forest service road south of The Dalles snapped some routine images that would spark a two-state investigation that was anything but ordinary.

The pictures showed two men exit a Toyota pickup armed with rifles, a spotlight and headlamps. Deer season was over, but Oregon State Police troopers discovered a headless deer carcass in the area.

A few days later, troopers spotted the same truck in The Dalles and pulled over the two men. William J. Haynes, 24, and Erik C. Martin, 23, would later confess to killing two bucks, a silver gray squirrel and to decapitating the deer and taking their heads back to Longview, Washington, documents show.

But that was just the beginning.

The trail camera eventually unraveled what Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife officials say is probably the largest poaching ring in that state's history, leading to the arrests of Haynes, Martin and six others. The Oregon investigation is ongoing and it's unclear whether all eight will face charges here, but officials in Washington estimate the case involves the illegal killing of more than 100 elk, deer, black bears, bobcats and other animals over a nearly two-year span.

The animals were not so much hunted as they were executed. In many cases, the carcasses were left to rot rather than harvested for meat, according to the investigation.

And while poaching is pervasive in both states — Oregon averages about 750 violations a year — Capt. Jeff Wickersham of Washington's wildlife enforcement office said he's never seen a more egregious case.

"They were doing it to kill," Wickersham said during an interview last month. "They were just killers. There's no redeeming quality to it."

Cases against several of the accused poachers are moving forward in Skamania County court this fall. The eight indi-



Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Dogs attack a bear in Washington state.

**'If this is more widespread than it is now, then I just don't have enough people, and that's really frustrating.'**

Capt. Jeff Wickersham  
Washington wildlife enforcement office

viduals charged thus far face 191 criminal counts, including 33 felony charges, The Seattle Times reported Thursday.

### Illegal killings

The illegal killings are frustrating for the general public and for the vast majority of hunters, who follow the rules and pay for tags to hunt game in specific seasons. In Oregon, hunters even pool money to help pay for tips that lead to poaching arrests.

Haynes, Martin and 30-year-old Joseph Dills were featured prominently in the hundreds of pages of investigative reports obtained by The Oregonian. None could be immediately reached for comment.

Oregon State Police declined comment last month and did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Thursday.

Investigators obtained a treasure trove of evidence thanks to the men's cellphones and the GPS tracking embedded in their smartphones. On those devices, troopers discovered hundreds of images, texts and videos.

The photos and videos included geotagged locations, allowing investigators to hone

in on specific sites and discover more evidence, including carcasses and bullet casings.

In March, officials seized 84 packages of various game meats from Haynes' freezer in the Longview area and an entire bobcat carcass.

Wickersham said the group killed at least 20 black bears in Washington alone, frequently leaving the animals to rot in the woods. Troopers used their phones' geolocation services to locate bear carcasses in the woods.

The poachers used Dills' dogs in several instances to tree bears, according to the investigation. Treeing bears or cougars is illegal in both states.

The case files include videos showing the men shooting a bear out of a tree with dogs barking all around. The men then order the dogs to

attack the bear after it fell to the ground.

### Broad daylight

Some of the hunts occurred at night, but many of the incidents happened in broad daylight.

Wickersham said that fact alone is troubling. "We never received any phone calls," he said of the illegal activity.

He urged hunters or outdoor enthusiasts to call in any suspicious activity and not assume what they see is legal.

Wickersham says Washington has just 130 enforcement officers assigned to patrol the entire state. "If this is more widespread than it is now," he said of the illegal killing, "Then I just don't have enough people, and that's really frustrating."

Oregon has even fewer — just 120 troopers dedicated to game enforcement.

Haynes, Martin and Dills texted each other frequently with photos of various animals the three had killed.

Two weeks before the two were captured on a trail camera in Oregon, documents show that Haynes texted Martin, asking, "You ready to kill (expletive) tonight?"

Martin responded, "Hell yeah, n\*\*\*\*," according to the investigation. Several of the accused, who are largely young white men from southwest Washington, routinely used the racial slur in texts to one another.

Wickersham said the investigation is continuing. He said some of the accused were involved in a 2008 poaching crew known as the "Kill 'Em all Boyz." According to public records, Dills pled guilty in 2008 and faced more than \$2,000 in fines related to that incident.

Wickersham said he sees the killings as nothing more than bragging rights first and foremost. "It's friendship in the worst way so to speak," he said of the group, "A very terrible way of showing camaraderie with one another."

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