

HUNT: 394 deer, 255 elk illegally harvested in 2016

Continued from 1A

Police Department. He joined the OSP Fish and Wildlife Division in 2003 and never looked back.

"I always wanted to do this job," Gardner said. "As far as police work goes, this is where it's at."

Growing up, Gardner spent plenty of time in the woods hunting and fishing and has developed a remarkable eye for spotting faint, faraway wildlife. Even a single prowling coyote cannot escape his radar-like vision.

Gardner's supervisor, Sgt. Tim Brown, said that kind of local knowledge of hunting and fishing makes him a tremendous asset to the team.

"He's passionate about the work he does, and it shows as far as his tenacity," Brown said.

The dirt road through Bridge Creek Wildlife Area becomes increasingly rough as Gardner drives down into a draw, fog rolling off the surrounding hillsides. The radio is so far quiet, which is a good sign though Gardner knows how quickly that can change.

"We've had years where we're salvaging double-digit numbers of elk in a weekend," he said.

According to OSP figures, 394 deer and 255 elk were illegally harvested statewide in 2016. That compares to 492 deer and 231 elk in 2015, and 504 deer and 222 elk in 2014.

Poaching will always be an issue wherever there is wildlife, Gardner said, though he is quick to point out the difference between poachers and ethical hunters who sometimes make mistakes. If a hunter mistakenly takes an animal out of season, he said they should report the incident so at least the meat can be salvaged.

"If they call in, we'll do everything we can for them," Gardner said. "If they don't and leave it to waste, we'll do everything we can to catch them."

OSP Fish and Wildlife is the state's main line of defense to uphold hunting and fishing laws. Troopers like Gardner are out on patrol year-round across the state, checking tags, gathering tips and generally making their presence known.

"Really, you just hope you're visible so somebody will think twice before they make that bad shot or bad decision," he said.

"Somebody rushed a shot"

By mid-afternoon, the radio crackles to life as Gardner is alerted to a mortally wounded branch bull elk not far from Mushroom Camp in the Umatilla National Forest.

It takes some time navigating the uneven Forest Service roads, but Gardner eventually meets with Sponseller, fellow OSP Trooper Ryan Sharp and Deputy Rick Carter with the Umatilla County Sheriff's



Staff photo by George Plaven

Dain Gardner, senior trooper with the Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division, looks out over the Blue Mountains south of Ukiah on Saturday, the first day of second season elk hunting in Eastern Oregon.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Oregon State Police Senior Trooper Dain Gardner talks to Oregon City-area hunters as he patrolled the woods near Ukiah on Tuesday.

Office. Carter was first tipped to the gut-shot elk by another hunter, and was forced to euthanize the animal.

The four men convened around the dead bull, and the dirty work began as they field dressed the elk, removing its organs and dragging it out of the thick woods behind Carter's four-wheeler. It would eventually be skinned and butchered, and the meat distributed either to CAPECO in Pendleton, Agape House in Hermiston or the Ukiah School District.

"Luckily someone called it in," Gardner said. "Otherwise it would have been left here to rot."

Despite the fact that someone clearly committed a crime, Gardner said there is very little evidence to pursue a case. Without finding a bullet or even a footprint, it is unlikely they will be able to catch the culprit.

"Really, we've got

nothing," he said. "I don't even have a reason to believe they tracked it that far."

Carter, a retired OSP Fish and Wildlife trooper, said it is unlikely an experienced hunter would mistake the three-point bull for a spike. It is a maddening situation, Gardner agreed, compounded by the fact that it was nearly left to waste.

"Somebody rushed a shot before they knew what was on its head," Gardner said. "And it happens every year."

"That's cool to see"

Hunters are the number one wildlife management tool in Oregon, Gardner said, and most of the people he meets are more than happy to help him catch those who break the rules.

"Out here, I come in contact with really super nice people," he said.

In fact, Gardner was recognized Oct. 17 with an award from the Oregon Hunters

Association Columbia Basin Chapter for his work investigating two recent poaching cases, one in Baker County and one in Umatilla County, that both ended in convictions.

Dean Groshong, chapter president, said the goal is to preserve the hunting tradition for future generations.

"Everybody is basically responsible to help out and prevent any wrongdoing," Groshong said. "It's just not fair and not acceptable for people to break the law."

While on patrol, Gardner frequently stops to visit with hunters huddled around their campfire or passing by in their vehicles to chat, which he said is the best way to learn about what is happening on any given day in the otherwise remote areas of the forest.

Finally, Gardner arrives at a camp where 14-year-old Steven Stanley, of The Dalles, has just returned from a successful hunt. Stanley proudly tags his spike, which brings a smile to Gardner's face.

"That's cool to see," Gardner said. "It makes me remember how I felt when that happened for me, and it shows me it will continue."

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

OHA: New director promises to increase transparency

Continued from 1A

2016, but OHA can't say who specifically was notified or exactly when.

Moore and Buckstein diverge on whether the fact that one party controls most of the state's branches of government plays a role in recent failures by agencies to correct course.

Most state executive offices are held by Democrats, as are both chambers of the Legislature.

"My reading of Oregon history is it's not," Moore said. "And it is, however, part of bureaucracies that get self-centered, and they stop responding to outside pressure."

Buckstein, though, said that having one party in control can increase reluctance to raise red flags.

"It's not the fact that they're Democrats, it's the fact that they're all the same party and philosophy," Buckstein said. "There's pressure not to criticize your compadres, so to speak, and there's the same pressures in the Republican Party."

Buckstein also maintains that from his political perspective, the government should play a limited role in healthcare.

"I think it's really a matter of trying to do what they shouldn't be doing in the first place, and they're not doing it very well," he said.

Oregon Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, a Republican, said last week that an audit of the state's Medicaid program, expected to be complete by early December, will highlight management problems.

OHA, for its part, says its new eligibility system, which was fully implemented earlier this year, is more accurate and links up with the payment system properly, so the overpayment problem will not continue. A recent audit by the Secretary of State also found that those two systems worked well.

The agency says it has

also streamlined who can retroactively determine someone ineligible for Medicaid in an effort to keep better track of patient data.

OHA's new director, Patrick Allen, has also promised to increase transparency at the agency.

Gov. Kate Brown appointed Allen, the former head of the Department of Consumer and Business Services, to the OHA post two months ago in the wake of another recent scandal at OHA — August news that top officials had planned to discredit a Portland-area Medicaid provider by planting negative stories in the press.

Allen's first email to OHA staff, released to the EO/Pamplin Capital Bureau through a public records request, acknowledged Cover Oregon created problems internally as well as externally.

"I have seen the impact the Cover Oregon failure had on people who needed coverage through Oregon's Health Insurance Marketplace and the Oregon Health Plan," Allen said. "As well as the resulting decrease in public trust and staff morale."

Allen has also brought on new staff members and, instead of keeping the duties of a chief operating officer and chief financial officer in one position, decided to make them separate. He also said the agency would be "taking some time to evaluate the best organizational structure" for the Medicaid program.

Moore said that some of the entrenched issues may be resolved by hiring people whose expertise is the "nuts and bolts" of technical systems in healthcare, who know what the potential pitfalls are and what to watch out for — someone who played a management role at the OHA equivalent in another state.

"So far, (Brown) has moved people from one agency to another," Moore said. "...Which is good, but you know, is that enough?"

HOTEL: Company has not paid any property taxes

Continued from 1A

Olsen said he has no idea if Western Hotels & Properties removed the carpet and picked up any trash, but the site is a mess and not secure. The county's code enforcement department determined it meets the criteria of a dangerous building.

Olsen on Oct. 6 sent Western Hotels the dangerous building notice via certified mail and someone signed for it, he said. That same day, code enforcement tacked notices to one end of the building and near the front entrance.

"Basically, (it's) a notice giving them the opportunity to address the violations," Olsen explained.

So far, no one has.

This is the county's first use of its new dangerous building law, which the board of commissioners approved June 28, in part to deal with the Rodeo City Inn. The local law allows 60 days to secure a building and six months "to remedy the dangerous conditions," Olsen said.

"If we take it to court it would be a \$1,000 fine," he said, "and \$500 per week until it's brought up to compliance."

Olsen said he has been



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Items are piled in front of the office on Tuesday at the Rodeo City Inn outside of Pendleton.

dealing with Suresh "Kris" Krishnan of Western Hotels. The *East Oregonian* reached Krishnan on Facebook, but he did not respond to messages by deadline Tuesday.

Olsen said he certainly

hopes Western Hotels comes through on its plans for the old hotel. County records show the company has not paid any property taxes for the site and owes \$15,828, including \$5,934 for 2017-18.

Age 60+? Need legal help for:

Keeping your income • getting medical care • moving into or out of a care facility • housing problems • utility shut-offs • stopping abuse • contesting a guardianship?

For referral to an attorney, call toll-free: 1-855-673-2372.

ADRC
Aging and Disability
Resource Connection
OF OREGON

1-855-ORE-ADRC
(673-2372)

www.ADRCoOregon.org

ADRC operates through the Oregon Department of Human Services

For a free handbook, "Legal Issues for Older Adults," published by the Oregon State Bar, call: 503-945-6237 (available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Russian, or Chinese).

Know what jeans are designed for the saddle?

D&B knows.

Wrangler® jeans are made for comfort, no matter the ride, with rolled seams on the outside to get rid of the rub. That's what makes Wrangler® a perfect fit for life in the West.

Wrangler

D & B SUPPLY

myDBsupply.com