

'I screamed, pulled my rifle up and I shot'

By ERIC MORTENSON
EO Media Group

The Oregon elk hunter who shot a protected gray wolf believes he would have been mauled or killed if he hadn't fired when it ran at him.

Brian Scott is being roasted on social media and criticized by biologists and activists who question his story. They've keyed in on the bullet's trajectory, which passed through the wolf's shoulders, perhaps indicating it was standing broadside to Scott instead of running directly at him.

Scott said he can't explain it and doesn't know if the wolf perhaps veered sideways as he fired. Scott said he has replayed the moment in his mind countless times and always concludes he did what he had to do.

"I've got to live with what I did for the rest of my life," Scott said in an hour-long phone interview with EO Media Group. "I killed a wolf. It makes me almost nauseous to think about that moment.

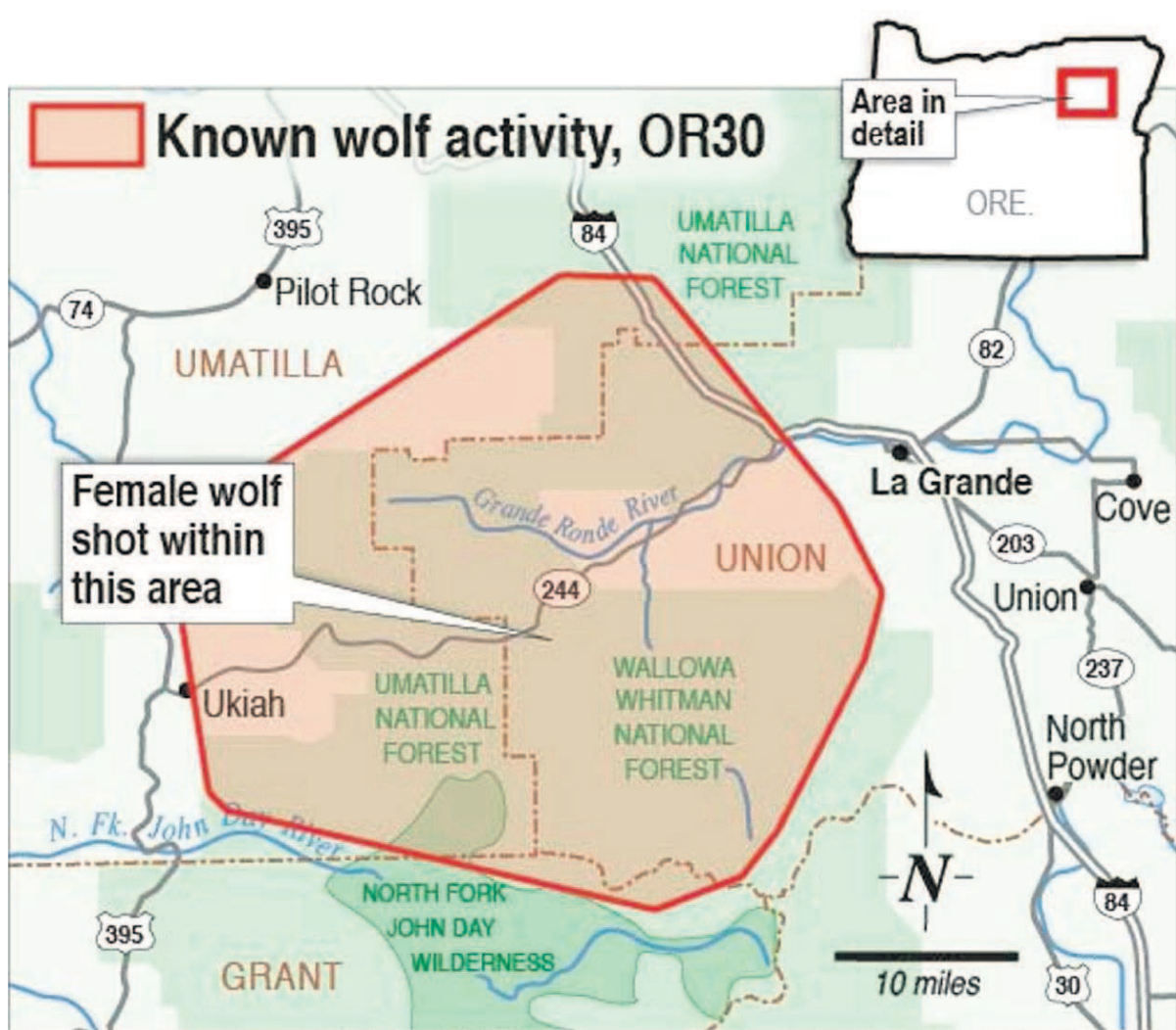
"I take no pride in this at all," he said. "The only thing I'm happy about is I made it home to my wife and children."

Scott, 38, lives in Clackamas, a suburb of Portland. He and his wife have two elementary school-age children and he owns a small business. He said he has hunted since he was a boy in Texas and described himself as a "meat hunter," someone who eats what they kill. On Oct. 27 he was on his third day of hunting elk in ODFW's Starkey Wildlife Management Unit west of La Grande, in Northeast Oregon.

Scott said he was in fog-shrouded timber and intermittently saw animals moving around him, but wasn't sure if he was seeing a cougar, coyotes or something else. He made his way out of the fog to a ridge top and sat for perhaps 25 minutes, then walked out into a meadow. Two wolves emerged from the fog to his left, looked at him, then headed in what he described as a flanking move behind him. A third wolf came running directly at him.

"I screamed, got it in my (scope) crosshairs, saw fur and pulled the trigger," Scott said. He said he whirled around, fearing the other two would attack, but saw them running away. He heard a fourth wolf howl nearby, and believes a pack was around him. ODFW has not officially designated a pack in that area; instead referring to it as territory of a collared wolf known as OR-30 and his mate. The wolf Scott shot, an 83-pound female, might be their offspring.

Badly shaken, Scott returned to his hunting camp about a mile away and told companions what had happened. They went to the



Source: Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife

Alan Kenaga/EO Media Group

site, confirmed it was a wolf and Scott called Oregon State Police and ODFW.

A casing from Scott's 30.06 rifle was found 27 yards from the carcass. The Union County district attorney's office in La Grande reviewed the case and decided not to press charges. An Oregon State Police spokesman said evidence at the scene backed Scott's story and said the fact that he self-reported killing the wolf was "compelling."

Scott, who was hunting alone at the time, said he could have hidden the wolf's carcass and told his companions back at camp that the gunshot they heard was him firing at an elk and missing.

"I feel like I did the right thing," he said. "I reported it immediately and was ready to face public scrutiny."

That has surely been the case. On social media and in comments to on-line news articles, posters have called Scott a liar, coward and an irresponsible hunter.

Carter Niemeyer, a retired U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist who is considered one of the nation's top wolf experts, said he didn't believe Scott's story because of the bullet's path. "That's a broadside shot," he told EO Media



A 72-pound female wolf of the Minam Pack, after being radio-collared on June 3.

Group.

He and others said wolves are afraid of humans. People in such situations should make their presence known, shout, throw things or, if armed, fire a shot into the ground. Niemeyer said people venturing into the forest should carry bear repellent spray, which would work on wolves, cougars or coyotes.

Activists point out that wolves

have not harmed anyone since they re-entered Oregon and the state established a management plan. At the end of 2016, ODFW confirmed 112 wolves in Oregon; the actual number is presumed to be higher.

Rob Klavins, Northeast Oregon representative for the conservation group Oregon Wild, said he's encountered wolves several times in Wallowa County without harm to

his hiking party or his dogs, which he keeps on leash in wolf territory.

"This person may have felt fear, but since wolves returned to Oregon no one has so much as been licked by a wolf, and that's still true today," he said.

Derek Broman, an ODFW carnivore biologist, said wolves often travel in pairs or packs, and seeing several together does not necessarily mean they were in a hunting formation.

He said wolves are "couraging" hunters, meaning they take down prey by chasing, repeatedly biting and wearing down elk, deer or cattle. They will approach stealthily and charge, seeking to attack in habitat that allows them to move easily, Broman said.

Broman said animals in the wild usually avoid people, and wolf attacks on humans are extremely rare. People faced with a wolf should not run, he said, because that would trigger an innate, evolutionary chase response.

Animals have evolved to recognize certain prey, and humans are "something completely different" to predators, he said.

"On a minute-by-minute basis, wildlife is trying to survive," Broman said. "If they don't have a 90 percent chance of success, they're not going to give it a go. Cougars are so powerful they could do anything, but they don't."

"For a wolf to come near is not totally unheard of, and it's not necessarily concerning," he said. "We don't know what the animal was keying in on, or if it was keying in on anything at all."

Scott said critics should put themselves in his shoes.

"I felt I had run out of time," he said. "I'm a dog owner, I grew up on a ranch, I know how fast dogs are. Twenty-seven yards gave me seconds to react."

Scott said he doesn't demonize wolves; he considers them majestic animals. He said hunters and others going into the wild should be aware they are more likely now to encounter wolves. He thinks ODFW should do more to educate the public, an effort that could include posting warning signs at the approaches to known pack territory.

In the meantime, he's enduring ridicule and doubt about his account.

"This isn't me sitting there watching a wolf, taking a pot shot, then panicking, calling up Oregon State Police and making up an absurd story," he said.

"I was being charged by a wolf," he said. "The wolf is now dead and I got to come home. Whether people want to buy that or not, I don't care."

Steelhead super spawners

About 100 repeat spawners released on Snake River

By ERIC BARKER
of the (Lewiston) Tribune

ILLIA — Wild B-run steelhead are getting a needed boost from a program that seeks to capitalize on the species' ability to spawn more than once.

About 100 repeat spawners were released below Lower Granite Dam on the Snake River Monday, after spending six to 18 months at the Nez Perce Tribal Hatchery.

"The really important part of it is these are wild fish," said Doug Hatch, a senior research scientist with the Columbia River Inter-tribal Fish Commission at Portland.

Steelhead are unique among Columbia River anadromous fish in that they don't necessarily die after reproducing. Females of the species have the ability to make their way back to the ocean to feed, regain strength and eventually repeat their spawning odyssey. Those that do it are bigger and produce as many as 50 percent more eggs than first-time spawners.

About 50 percent of wild Snake River steelhead become kelts — those that attempt the post-spawn downstream journey as adults. But almost none of them make it. Hatch said only about 0.4 percent of any given Snake River steelhead run is comprised of repeat spawners.

The commission, along with the Nez Perce Tribe and the University of Idaho, operates a program that seeks to boost wild steelhead numbers by helping kelts become repeat spawners. Instead of letting the fish fend for themselves while trying to reach the ocean, they are intercepted and taken to the hatchery at Cherrylane to be reconditioned.

The fish released Tuesday were in beautiful shape, but when biologists plucked them from a fish trap at Lower Granite Dam in the spring of 2016 they were skinny and haggard. They'd just spent about half a year in fresh water. To reach their spawning grounds, they escaped sea lions on the lower Columbia River, climbed concrete ladders at eight



Lewiston High School senior Sean Schumacher lifts one of about 100 wild B-run steelhead released into the Snake River below Lower Granite Dam Tuesday. The effort is part of Nez Perce Tribe, Columbia River Inter-tribal Fish Commission and University of Idaho project to recondition female steelhead so they can spawn a second time.

"The really important part of it is these are wild fish."

— Doug Hatch,
Columbia River Inter-tribal Fish Commission

dams and managed to avoid being caught by thousands of anglers. They battled each other for the best spawning habitat, used their bodies to dig egg nests in gravel and did it all without eating.

At the hatchery they were fed a diet high in fat. Biologists monitored their blood to determine when they were ready to spawn again. The program is one of the many steps the federal government is taking to try to prevent steelhead from going extinct.

Other actions include spilling water at the dams to help juvenile steelhead survive their trip to the ocean, improving spawning habitat to make it more productive and taking care to reduce competition between fish that spawn naturally and those raised in hatcheries.

Despite those steps, wild steelhead remain in trouble. Predictions vary, but according to some estimates as few as 800 wild B-run steelhead may return to the Clearwater and Salmon rivers this fall. Hatch said about 500 of those may be female. So releasing the 100 reconditioned repeat spawners has the ability to boost wild B-run spawners by 20 percent.

"Certainly in these down years for steelhead, it's a super safety net program," he said.

The program, which is limited by a lack of available space at the hatchery, is poised to get a boost. The captured kelts are kept in two small circular tanks at the hatchery. Plans are in the works to construct a new building with six large tanks, which will help meet program target of releasing about 180 repeat spawners annually.

"In the next year, we should have the facility built and we can really attack the project goals," Hatch said.

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Applications sought for John Day-Snake River RAC

East Oregonian

The Bureau of Land Management is seeking nominations for up to nine positions on the John Day-Snake River Resource Advisory Council, a citizen-based group that provides guidance on managing public lands for multiple uses in the area.

The RAC boundaries cover a wide swath of central and Eastern Oregon, including all public lands within the BLM's Prineville and Vale district offices as well as the Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman, Malheur, Ochoco and Deschutes national forests.

Members of the RAC meet three to four times a year at different sites around the region, working to familiarize themselves with issues such as wildfire recovery, sage grouse habitat, wild horse management, land use designations and other topics.

The RAC also provides recommendations on new fee proposals for recreational facilities on Forest Service and BLM land. Currently, the group

is working on proposals for fee changes on both the lower Deschutes River and Hells Canyon Recreation Area.

Open positions on the RAC span three general categories, including:

- Category 1 — public land ranchers, energy and mineral developers, timber industry and commercial recreation representatives.
- Category 2 — environmental groups, archaeological and historical organizations, dispersed recreation and wild horse and burro advocates.
- Category 3 — state, county or local elected offices, state agencies, local American Indian tribes, academic institutions or the public at large.

Individuals may nominate themselves or others to serve on the RAC, though representatives must be residents of Oregon or Washington, where the group has jurisdiction. Applications will be accepted through Dec. 1.

For more information, contact Lisa Clark at 541-416-6864 or email lmclark@blm.gov.

Cougar alert in coastal tourist town

SEASIDE — When neighbors reported a possible cougar in Seaside last week, Seaside Heights Elementary School responded by moving all student activities inside. Pet owners at the nearby Creekside Village Apartments were advised to keep their pets safe and on leashes after several cats were reported missing.

This week, the district is back to normal activities,

based on advice from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

"I also have not heard of any sightings since our last report," said the principal.

The risk of danger to students at school was very low, Seaside School District Superintendent Sheila Roley said. "Cougars move through areas in a few days as they roam their territory," she said.