

PILOT ROCK

Despite permit, no problem turkeys killed

By PHIL WRIGHT  
East Oregonian

The federal wildlife service stands ready to take out wild turkeys roaming Pilot Rock should the need arise.

So far, it hasn't. Citizen complaints about the turkeys causing property damage and creating mounds of scat prompted the city council last year to ban feeding the birds, and on Nov. 21 the council voted in favor of having the United States Department of Agriculture eliminate the wild turkeys.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in Pendleton on Dec. 11 wrote the kill permit. State wildlife biologist Mark Kirsch said the permit allows the city to pursue lethal taking within certain parameters and designates the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service as the agency to handle the work.

Kevin Christensen is the assistant state director for ALPHIS and Wildlife Services in Oregon. He explained the division uses a series of steps before an agent can kill an animal, beginning with an on-site inspection to assess if wild animals are a real threat or actually causing property damage.

"A lot of people would have the perception of damage or the threat ... but that may not be the case," he said.

Field agents also look to see if efforts to harass or haze wildlife are working. Christensen said folks might have done good work harassing animals or putting up barriers, for example, but maybe there are other methods Wildlife Services can help with.



EO file photo

In this Sept. 2017 file photo, a pair of wild turkeys walk through a yard in Pilot Rock.

Agents have to check back to see if the harassment was successful.

"Then if nothing else works," he said, "they have to find a suitable, safe location to generally use a firearm to take turkeys."

That does not mean busting buckshot in bunches of birds.

"When taking one animal, you have educated the other 10 or 20 or 30," he said.

Agents again return to reinforce the negative consequences. Christensen said that might just mean showing up and not having to fire a gun. He said the goal is to convince the birds they are no longer safe and returning to the wild is the better option.

The gist of the process, he said, is using the least amount of response to get the desired action from wildlife.

Wildlife services employs about 15 people statewide,

including field agents working out of their homes. Umatilla County has one agent, Ken Mitchell, who Christensen said acts as a "one-stop shop" for all kinds of wildlife situations. Christensen said he did not know if Mitchell has made an assessment of Pilot Rock's turkeys, but he has not killed any to date.

ODFW's Kirsch also confirmed there have been no kills. The turkeys in recent weeks have not been running around the city, he said, so there does not seem to be a need right now.

He also said the permit requires the carcasses be returned to the state.

"We're going to try to salvage the birds for charitable distribution," he said.

Municipalities struggling with turkey damage is not atypical, Kirsch said, and it takes a city council

interacting with its citizens to reach conclusions on how to handle the situation. But some solutions don't work so well.

Pilot Rock has heard from at least one local willing to relocate the turkeys. Kirsch said these birds have been hanging around people and pets, and state veterinarians would have little confidence the turkeys are free from transmitting disease.

The turkeys also are accustomed to people, he said, so relocating them means the state has to ensure they don't bother new neighbors.

"Again, our comfort levels with that are not super high," Kirsch said. "We don't want to move a problem from one place and create it for someone else."

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BRIEFLY

Former Echo councilor Nakapalau dies

ECHO — Lou Nakapalau, former Echo city councilor, has died. He was 66.

Stanfield Police Chief Byron Zumwalt said Friday there is nothing suspicious about the death.

"We're calling it natural causes," he said.

Nakapalau did not show up for a doctor's appointment Friday, Zumwalt said, and his department received a call to check on him at his Main Street home. The chief also said his department is working with the county medical examiner. He said he did not anticipate releasing more information.

"At this point, it's like any other unattended death," Zumwalt said.

Nakapalau recently resigned from the Echo City Council amid a controversy over remarks he made on social media and revelations about past criminal charges.

He was a speaker at multiple Veterans Day events at local schools, where he spoke about his two Army tours in Vietnam from 1969 to 1971.

Sheriff's patrol car theft suspect faces three criminal cases

HERMISTON — Christopher Alvin Phillips of Hermiston faces 11 counts for burglary as well as stealing and crashing a Umatilla County Sheriff's Office patrol car.

The district attorney's office arraigned Phillips, 23, Friday afternoon in the Hermiston courtroom of Circuit Judge Eva Temple, according to court records. The charges range from misdemeanors of unlawful entry into a motor vehicle and third-degree theft to felonies of unauthorized use of a vehicle and attempted first-degree burglary.

The Umatilla County Sheriff's Office the morning of Jan. 18 responded to a report of a suspicious vehicle at a vacant house near 33464 E. Punkin Center Road east of Hermiston. Deputy Chris Daugherty found the vehicle, a red 1994 Ford Explorer, as well as Phillips and Tyler Morris, 19.

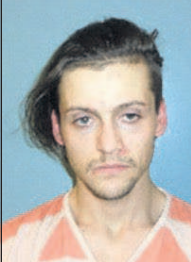
Daugherty arrested and handcuffed Phillips and put him in the back seat of the patrol car, according to a written statement from the sheriff's office, and released Morris. Daugherty kept his car running while waiting outside for a tow truck to take the Explorer. That's when Phillips moved his cuffs to his front, broke out the rear window of the patrol car, crawled into the driver's seat and took off.

He crashed the car in a small canal at the corner of Tabor and Punkin Center roads, then fled on foot. Deputies that afternoon caught Phillips near the Short Stop gas station at 32553 E. Punkin Center Road.

The district attorney's office also charged Phillips in two more cases:

- First-degree criminal mischief, second-degree burglary, second-degree theft for a Jan. 2 break-in at Eastside Market, 528 E. Main St., Hermiston;
- and first-degree burglary, first-degree criminal trespass and third-degree theft for a Jan. 11 break-in at 33464 E. Punkin Center Road, Hermiston.

Phillips has hearings Feb. 12 to consider trial readiness in each case. Until then, he remains in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, in lieu of \$225,000 bail.



Phillips

STANFIELD

Dojo to break boards for young cancer patient

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN  
East Oregonian

A local taekwondo studio is getting ready to break bricks and boards in the hopes of raising money for a local girl fighting cancer.

Erwin Watson, owner of Eastern Oregon Family Tae Kwon Do, said his students are soliciting donations from their friends and family, in the hopes of donating the proceeds to Maddy Thomas, an 11-year-old from Echo. Thomas was diagnosed with a pilocytic astrocytoma, a brain tumor, in August. She had surgery in October to remove part of the tumor, but due to the location of the growth, not all of it could be removed by surgery. She is undergoing chemotherapy to shrink the rest of it.

Maddy's mother Jenny Thomas said her daughter had been doing well, but had to go back to the hospital in Seattle earlier this week to get treatment for a blood infection. But she said her daughter has been positive throughout her illness.

"She is one strong cookie," Thomas said. "She wants to be at school. She gets upset that she can't do as much, but she always has a smile."

Watson said his students



Contributed photo

Maddy Thomas, 11, is fighting cancer. A Stanfield taekwondo studio is hosting a "breakathon" on Feb. 3, breaking boards and bricks and raising money to help Thomas. The event is open to the public.

are asking their friends and family to purchase boards or bricks, which the students will then get to break as part of their taekwondo training. Bricks can be purchased for \$5, and wooden boards for \$15. The bricks and boards were donated by the manager at Home Depot.

The board-breaking event will take place on Saturday, Feb. 3 at the studio, at 155 W.

Coe Ave. in Stanfield.

Watson said so far, some students have raised hundreds of dollars.

"Money is still coming in," he said. "We've had a couple of kids bring in \$400."

He said the studio has about 80 students.

A few weeks ago, Watson said, Maddie and her mom came in and met some of the students, and

watched a practice.

"If she's feeling well enough, I'm hoping she'll be there," he said.

Thomas said her daughter was excited while watching the taekwondo practice.

"The first thing she said to me was, 'When I get better, can I take a class?'" Thomas said.

Another child who has battled cancer will also be in attendance, Watson said. A few years ago, Watson's studio raised money for Marcos Madera, a McNary boy who was diagnosed with cancer. Watson found out that his mother was struggling to make ends meet as she took him to Portland for treatment, and wanted to help.

He found out about Thomas through a Facebook friend, and immediately sent her a message asking if his class could help.

Thomas said her family had been overwhelmed by the support from Watson and other community members.

"They've been a huge support, allowing us to spend more time helping her," Thomas said.

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