

State police lack proof that wolf deaths were human-caused

By Eric Mortenson
EO Media Group

The lead Oregon State Police investigator said the agency does not have probable cause to believe humans caused the deaths of the Sled Springs wolf pair in August.

Senior Trooper Kreg Coggins also said it's unclear how the wolves died. State police use a standard of 51 percent certainty in determining probable cause, he said, and evidence in the case did not reach that level.

"At this point it's somewhat of a mystery," he said.

It's not always easy to tell if an animal has been shot or poisoned, Coggins said. Decomposition complicates investigations, and the wolves were

found dead during hot August weather, he said.

Coggins declined to speculate on what happened.

The environmental group Oregon Wild has called the deaths "suspicious" because wolves have been killed illegally in Oregon previously and "there is a very vocal minority that enthusiastically encourages it."

ODFW confirmed the Sled Springs Pair killed a calf in June. Coggins, who works out of OSP's Enterprise outpost, downplayed the possibility that the wolves were killed by ranchers or others in retaliation. Cattle have been attacked by wolves many times in Wallowa County, and no one has shot wolves in response, he said.

Oregon law defines probable cause as a "substantial objective basis" for believing a crime has been committed and a person to be arrested is responsible for it.

Northeast Oregon Wolves are protected under the state Endangered Species Act and killing them is a crime. But their presence is controversial, especially among cattle and sheep producers who bear the cost and stress of livestock losses and of non-lethal defensive measures.

The investigation began the week of Aug. 24 after a tracking collar worn by the female of the pair, OR-21, emitted a mortality signal. State police and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife searched the area, north of the town of Wal-

lowa, and found the female dead. Coggins said he went to the area the following day and found the male wolf dead as well. Police have said the wolves' bodies were within 50 yards of each other.

State police and ODFW did not announce the deaths until Sept. 16. OSP spokesman Lt. Bill Fugate said at the time that investigators delayed disclosing the information because they did not want to tip their hand.

The pair had pups that would have been about five months old when the adult wolves died. A ODFW spokeswoman said the pups have not been seen, but they should be weaned at this point and are most likely "free-ranging" and able to fend for themselves.



Bicycle tourists from the group Cycle Oregon pass through downtown Joseph.

Bringing in bike bucks

Bicycle travelers contribute \$400 million annually to Oregon's economy and spend \$124 more per trip than the average visitor.

But how does a NE Oregon county attract that money? Business owners can learn how at the Bicycle Tourism Studio program being put on by The Eastern Oregon Visitors Association and Travel Oregon.

The free community planning program will kick off with a region-wide workshop for local businesses and organizations on Oct. 22 at the Cook Memorial Library in La Grande. Follow-up community action planning meetings will take place in Union, Baker and Wallowa counties in November.

Participants will identify

and prioritize regional goals to foster development of appropriate bicycling infrastructure, business services and marketing activities, and motivate local action and next steps.

All participants are asked to attend both the region-wide workshop and at least one of the follow-up action planning meetings. Pre-registration is requested online at IndustryTravelOregon.com/northeastBTS. There is no cost to participate.

The region-wide workshop is scheduled for October 22 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Cook Memorial Library, 2006 Fourth St. La Grande. The follow-up action planning meeting will be held Nov. 18 from 8 a.m. to noon at the WC Chamber of Commerce.

Joseph Church blessed with fellowship center

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

Joseph United Methodist Church, located at 301 S Lake St., in Joseph is breaking new ground by doing just that - breaking ground for their new fellowship center. Construction on the project started Sept. 28.

Rev. Cherie Johnson, pastor of the church, says the whole congregation is behind the center, which has been about 15 years in the making. She hopes to use the center for community outreach.

"For starters, we'll use this as a complement to our Magic Garden project. We anticipate having a full commercial kitchen, and we'll offer classes on how to process food for long-term storage, so people can preserve their Magic Garden goods or products from their own garden," Johnson said.

Another purpose for the center is the lunches, which are currently held downstairs in the church. The area can be difficult to access for disabled or elderly people.

"We'll also use it to hold classes whether they're religious in nature or fellowship in nature," Johnson said.

As a ballroom dance instructor in a previous life, Johnson has the intriguing idea



The congregation of Joseph United Methodist Church stand next to the foundation of their new Fellowship Center. After posing for photos, the group broke into an impromptu version of the gospel standard "Holy Ground."

of holding dance classes in the center. School tutoring is a possibility as well.

"There's so many different options we can explore just by having the space," Johnson said.

Nearly all of the funds are already available to pay for the center's construction as church members have made various pledges through the years.

"We're really in a good place with that. Some people understandably said they

weren't paying their pledges until the first nail was driven. We may not have nails yet, but we have rebar!" Johnson said.

The project coming together after 15 was due to the perseverance of the church building committee and single board governance according to Johnson.

As a relative newcomer to the church, Johnson said the vast majority of preparation for the project was completed by the time she took the helm.

"I'm very proud of this church and I couldn't be more excited for what they want to do for the Wallowa County community," Johnson said.

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Folk instrument classes available

A beginning Appalachian Dulcimer class will be offered for five weeks on Tuesdays, October 20 to November 17 from 1 to 2:30 p.m., at the Woodshed, 705 S. River St. in Enterprise. The instructor will be Heidi Muller, a longtime player and teacher.

Cost is \$95 and pre-registration is required. There are dulcimers available to rent for an additional \$40. Some new instruments are also available for sale from the instructor.

One of America's own folk instruments, the dulcimer has a sweet and delicate sound. It is one of the easiest folk instruments to learn, having just three or four strings. There is no need to have a musical background.

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