

Protesters demand justice for Idaho rancher killed by deputies

Citizens say investigation a disservice to family

By Sean Ellis
Capital Press

BOISE — A rally to demand justice for Jack Yantis, the Adams County rancher who was shot and killed by sheriff's deputies last year, was held in front of the Idaho attorney general's office May 20.

The attorney general's office in March was handed the results of a months-long Idaho State Police investigation into the Nov. 1 shooting and is acting as special prosecutor in the case.

Protesters said the investigation has lasted too long and demanded the attorney general make a determination on whether the two Adams County sheriff's deputies involved in the shooting will be charged.

"It shouldn't take this long. My goodness, it's been over six months," said Melba rancher Steve Colson.

Yantis, a Council area rancher, was shot and killed by the deputies after he arrived at the scene where one of his bulls had been hit and injured by a car. He was asked by the dispatcher to go there.

Jordan Valley resident Michael McLaughlin, who has organized the Facebook page, "Justice for Jack," said the Yantis family deserves closure and



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Supporters of Jack Yantis, the Council, Idaho, rancher shot and killed by sheriff's deputies in November, demand justice for him May 20 in front of the Idaho attorney general's office in the state Capitol.

the investigation has taken too long.

"Two hundred days later, the whole family still doesn't have closure," he said. "Something's wrong with that."

The 12 protesters, a mix of Adams County and Boise area residents, stood in front of the attorney general's office with signs and stickers demanding justice and resolution.

The attorney general released a statement in response to the rally that encouraged people to be patient until the office thoroughly reviews the results of the state police investigation.

"In order to achieve justice, my office is fulfilling its prosecutorial duty to conduct a thorough, deliberate and careful review of all the evidence that has

been gathered in this complex case," Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden stated in the release.

Wasden said the case is a high priority for his office, "but we only get one chance to achieve justice for everyone involved, including Mr. Yantis. For that reason, I have not imposed any arbitrary time lines that could lead to a rush in judgment."

In a May 19 letter to Adams County commissioners, Wasden said the state police investigation was thorough, comprehensive and complex and he has instructed his investigators and prosecutors to be equally as thorough.

"It is important for you and for the people of Adams County to understand this process

takes considerable time," Wasden stated.

Colson, a former police officer, said he was stunned to learn that Yantis had been killed after responding to the scene where one of his bulls had been injured.

"The wife deserves to know ... why in the hell her husband was killed for doing what he was supposed to do," he said. "The whole thing just does not make sense."

Council resident Rebecca Barrow, who organized the protest rally, said it was held "to let the attorney general know that we haven't forgotten Jack was killed 200 days ago and we're asking him to put Jack's case first. ... The family deserves to know what he's going to decide."

Wounded bear attacks area hunter

By George Plaven
East Oregonian

A Pendleton hunter was attacked by a black bear May 22 in the Starkey Unit near La Grande.

Shane Thomas was by himself at Tony Vey Meadows about 6 miles up Forest Road 5160, said Sgt. Nick Pallis with the Union County Sheriff's Office. Thomas told officers he had shot the bear with his rifle and had walked into a thicket to retrieve the animal.

Except the bear wasn't dead. It attacked Thomas, who was unable to reach for his pistol and forced to fight back by kicking and yelling. Thomas was able to get away and drive himself back to the highway despite puncture wounds to his legs and backside, Pallis said.

Thomas texted his mother about what happened, and she called 911. Pallis said he paged Search and Rescue, though before they could respond his deputy actually passed Thomas on Highway 244. Thomas followed medics back to Grande Ronde Hospital in La Grande, where Pallis said he was treated and released.

"I give this young man some pretty good kudos," Pallis said. "Anyone who can fight off a bear the way he did ... that's an undertaking in and

of itself."

Pallis, however, added that Thomas was lucky. He said the incident underscores the need for hunters to have a partner with them in the wilderness in case of an accident or, in this case, an attack.

"It's always something you have to consider," Pallis said. "Accidents can happen, and animals can attack and hurt you."

Michelle Dennehy, spokeswoman with the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, said bear attacks are extremely rare in Oregon, but not unheard of. The agency has documented five incidents, none of which have been fatal. Two of the previous cases — one in Douglas County, and the other in Coos Bay — came under similar circumstances, where a wounded animal came back to attack a hunter.

"This is not the first time this has happened," Dennehy said.

She said hunters need to approach wildlife carefully, especially if those animals have been shot and injured.

Dennehy said they are not sure what happened to the bear that attacked Thomas.

Oregon is home to between 25,000 and 30,000 black bears, according to ODFW. Spring bear hunting season ended May 31 in northeast Oregon.

Oregon officials renew wildfire insurance policy

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon officials and forestland owners have renewed the state's wildfire insurance despite

failing to reach the policy's \$50 million deductible last year.

The price of the premium declined by \$300,000 to \$3.45 million in 2016, according to the Oregon Department of

Forestry. Underwriters gave the discount because state did not need to use the policy in 2015, said Sen. Alan Bates, D-Ashland.

The \$25 million policy is underwritten by Lloyd's, a London insurance consortium, and AXIS of Bermuda.

Federal and state agencies spent \$94.4 million on wildfire suppression in 2015, according to the Legislative

Fiscal Office. Only about \$30 million of that, however, was counted toward the state's wildfire insurance deductible.

A committee of public and private forestland owners voted in March to renew the policy. That committee typically pays 50 percent of the premium but could only pay 11 percent this year because state law limits how much it can spend fire suppression.

It has already hit that \$13.5 million threshold, leaving the state to make up the difference of nearly \$1.4 million.

The Joint Legislative Emergency Board — which approves budget adjustments between legislative sessions — approved that additional expenditure Wednesday.

Oregon is the only state in the nation to purchase wildfire insurance, though Washington also is considering acquiring a policy, said Rod Nichols, spokesman for the Department of Forestry.

"Oregon first purchased a policy in 1973 and has been doing so ever since," Nich-

ols said. "In many years, our expenditures did not meet the deductible, and the state filed no claims. But in severe fire seasons, the policy protected the general fund and prevented major disruption to state government programs across the board."

Between 1973 and 2008, the state reached its deductible and received a payout only 13 times, according to data from the Department of Forestry, but those payouts equaled \$2 million more than the premiums. The department did not immediately provide data on payouts between 2009 and 2014.

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