

Community

Baker man charged for leaving kids in car

By Chris Collins
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A Baker City man was arrested Wednesday afternoon on a charge of second-degree child neglect for allegedly leaving his two young children in a locked car for approximately 20 minutes when the temperature was near 90 degrees.

Philip Mayo Chua Astorga, 33, of 1425 Court Ave., was jailed on the Class A misdemeanor charge and later released on bail, Baker City Police Chief Dustin Newman said.

Police were called to a

parking lot at 1668 Resort St. at 1:17 p.m. Wednesday after receiving a phone call reporting that two small children had been left unattended in a vehicle in the direct sunlight, Newman stated in a press release.

The parking lot is shared by the Baker City Herald and the Styles R Us beauty salon. Astorga was starting his first day as a carrier for the Herald, said Davinee Hiner, the newspaper's circulation manager. Astorga has been released from his contract with the paper in order to take care of his legal

issues, Hiner said.

Newman said people at Styles R Us told police that the children, a 4-year-old boy and a 10-month-old girl, had been left alone in a 2003 Suzuki SUV. The vehicle was not running and was sitting in the direct sunlight, Newman said.

The temperature at the Baker City Airport at 1:10 p.m. on Wednesday was 88 degrees. It was 90 at 1:20 p.m. and 91 at 1:30 p.m.

Astorga returned to his vehicle when he noticed police officers in the parking lot.

Oregon Department of

Human Services employees were notified and took custody of the children at the parking lot. The children were not harmed and they were returned to their mother, Newman said.

Second-degree child neglect is a Class A misdemeanor. Under Oregon law, a person who has custody or control of a child younger than 10 commits the crime "if, with criminal neglect, the person leaves the child unattended in or at any place for such period of time as may be likely to endanger the health or welfare of such child."

FEMA GRANT PAYS 75 PERCENT OF COST

County gets \$850,000 to reduce fire risk

By Casey Crowley
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Baker County has received close to \$1 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to help property owners remove brush and do other work to reduce the risk of wildfires on their land.

The money will total around \$850,000, with \$750,000 of that going to a fuel reduction program. The FEMA funding will pay 75 percent of the cost, with property owners responsible for the remaining 25 percent.

The fuel reduction program will be used to clear debris from four properties around the county. The properties, which will range from 5 to 100 acres, haven't been selected from a list of applicants.

In addition to the fuel reduction project the county is using the remaining \$100,000 to fund three smaller fire prevention projects.

One is a computer risk assessment program that will be used by fire departments and protection districts around Baker County to help property owners evaluate the level of fire danger on their property.

The program is also used to note the location of possible fire hazards in relation to buildings. Some possible dangerous materials include propane tanks, wood shake roofing, brush that is too close to a building, or multiple buildings on a property.

"A fire department can be on the way to a fire and bring that up and they will know exactly what they are dealing with," County Commissioner Chairman Bill Harvey said.

Another part of the project is creating defensible spaces around about 10 properties across the county. Defensible spaces are areas, extending about 100 feet from a home or other building, that are cleared of debris, vegetation and other combustible materials.

Both the risk management program and defensible space plans were approved in the past 30 days. Work on the risk assessments has already begun and the defensible space project should begin in September.

"If we can go in and do prevention first it's far better, cheaper, longer-lasting protection and then we don't have to literally worry about these structures again later," Harvey said.

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COUNTY

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The county requested the extension based on four factors:

- The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is long and commissioners need more time to review it
- Paper copies have not been readily available
- 60 days is not enough time to review new guidelines in the plan
- Commissioners will not have enough time to gather opinions of the public.

In the letter rejecting the extension, Acting Regional Forester Dianne Guidry said that the factors listed by the county are "not among the very limited regula-

tory justifications for an extension."

Commission Chairman Bill Harvey plans to reply to the extension with a letter to Guidry. Originally Harvey intended to send the letter on behalf of the county, but Commissioner Bruce Nichols objected to that.

Harvey plans to mail the letter, under his signature only, today.

A draft of the letter addresses the Forest Service's lack of coordination with Baker County during the development of the forest plan.

Harvey contends the county has the legal right, under the federal coordination law, to be involved in the planning process for the forest plans.

In 2014 the commissioners also sub-

mitted an objection to a different version of the proposed forest plan.

In addition they will also submit a resolution rejecting the plan as a whole on the basis that it doesn't comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The resolution calls for the Forest Service to withdraw the new plans and to write a supplemental EIS.

Commissioners also plan to submit a formal written objection to the new forest plans before the Aug. 28 deadline.

The group Forest Access For All is holding a series of four meetings to help residents complete formal objection letters. One meeting will take place Aug. 8 at 6 p.m. at The Sunridge Inn in Baker City.

WOLVES

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DelCurto believes harassment by wolves is the most likely explanation for why his cattle would behave as they have done rather than stay in the cooler forests where forage is more abundant.

"Something's got them lit up, and I'd be willing to bet it's wolves," DelCurto said. "What else is going to do that?"

Wolves from the Pine Creek pack killed three of DelCurto's calves and injured four others in early April about eight miles southeast of Halfway. The cattle were grazing on private ground while waiting to move onto higher elevation Forest Service allotments in the southern Willowa Mountains.

DelCurto said he moved his approximately 150 cow-calf pairs to the Forest Service allotment in mid-June.

If wolves are harassing DelCurto's cattle, it's probably not the Pine Creek pack, said Brian Ratliff, district wildlife biologist at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) Baker City office.

ODFW has fitted two of the pack's wolves with tracking collars. Data from those collars show that at least those two wolves, and probably the pack, have rarely been in DelCurto's grazing allotment this summer, Ratliff said.

Those two wolves were not in that allotment earlier this week, when DelCurto said his cattle fled that area.

Those wolves have, however, been spending time in an adjacent Forest Service allotment, Ratliff said.

He said it's possible that other, noncollared wolves, have been in DelCurto's allotment.

Ratliff said ODFW documented, including with photographs, wolves in that vicinity last year that apparently were not part of the Pine Creek pack.

"That can pop up at any point," Ratliff said. "We just don't know."

DelCurto said he has hired someone to patrol parts of the allotment on horseback two days a week, and he also tries to patrol a day or two a week. But he said it's impos-

sible to keep track of his 150 cow-calf pairs in the heavily forested terrain that covers 40,000 to 50,000 acres, much less to pinpoint the location of wolves.

"There's a lot of brush, and in some of that area you can't see 100 feet ahead," DelCurto said. "It's like finding a needle in a haystack."

DelCurto said he has found two dead cows from his herd this summer.

One carcass was so deteriorated that the cause of death couldn't be determined. The second carcass was intact but there was no evidence that the animal had been attacked by a wolf or other animal, Ratliff said.

Ratliff said he and other ODFW officials have been setting up remote cameras and taking other steps to try to figure out how many wolf pups were born to the

Pine Creek pack's breeding female this spring

He said he's confident there are at least two pups, based on howling he heard on Monday. The wolves were not in DelCurto's allotment at that time, Ratliff said.

The pack consisted this spring of five adults, including the two collared wolves.

ODFW employees killed three wolves from the pack in April.

We welcome you back to the Baker County Fair Livestock Auction Friday, August 10th, 6:30 p.m. Pre-sale BBQ 4:30 - 6:30 p.m. Beef provided by LNK Ranches, LLC & The DLX THANK YOU for making the 2017 Baker County Fair 4-H/FFA Livestock Auction a success!

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