

Local & State

Divers find pickup truck containing skeletal remains in Columbia River

■ Vehicle was associated with case of missing person from Washington in 1993

By Phil Wright
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The discovery of a pickup containing skeletal remains in the Columbia River near Hermiston could solve a missing person case 26 years old.

According to a news release from the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office, a couple recreationally scuba diving on Oct. 17 in the Columbia River at the Hat Rock State Park boat launch reported discovering a submerged Ford Ranger pickup with Washington license plates. The vehicle was in approximately 20 feet of water just past the end of the docks.

Dispatchers checked the license plate and found the vehicle was associated with a missing person case from the police department in Prosser, Washington, going back 26 years.

Maynard Koen, who was born in 1911, according to the sheriff's office, went missing in August 1993.

The sheriff's office arranged for Columbia Basin



Photo from Umatilla County Sheriff's Office

Members of the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office and Columbia Basin Dive Rescue of Richland, Wash., check out the Ford Ranger they helped recover Saturday from the Columbia River at Hat Rock State Park near Hermiston. The pickup and the remains inside could solve a missing person case dating back to 1993.

Dive Rescue of Richland, Washington, and D & R Towing, Hermiston, to assist in recovering the pickup. The sheriff's office, the volunteer dive agency and tow company met Saturday at 10:30 a.m. at the site to begin the recovery.

Sheriff's office marine deputies assisted with any

boating traffic or other river-based needs. After approximately two hours, the team removed the pickup from the river and hauled it to the sheriff's office for further investigation.

"Based on the condition of the vehicle and the information available, it appears

likely that this vehicle was submerged in this location at or around the time Mr. Koen was reported missing," according to the sheriff's office. "Further investigation of the interior of the vehicle revealed skeletal remains and a driver's license issued to Mr. Koen."

Governor appoints team to look at cash flow problems with Forestry Department

By Ted Sickinger
The Oregonian

Gov. Kate Brown has appointed a financial oversight team and will hire an independent contractor to address a cash flow crisis caused by the Oregon Department of Forestry's failure to promptly bill and collect money it is owed for wildfire costs.

The 13-member team, chaired by the governor's chief of staff, is tasked with identifying the structural changes needed to expedite and standardize how the agency processes financial transactions related to wildfires.

It will also evaluate new ways for the agency to manage its seasonal borrowing needs.

The cash flow problems, reported in an Oct. 6 story in The Oregonian, come as the agency is facing structural financial problems in its state forest program, and a \$1.4 billion breach of contract by 14 counties that begins Thursday.

The Forestry Department's fire division is responsible for fighting fires on private and state land. It also contributes much of the resources needed to fight fires on land owned by the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service.

The agency has more than \$100 million in outstanding receivables related to wildfires as far back as 2013, most of them due from federal agencies. Of that amount, \$46 million has yet to be invoiced.

Short on funds without that money, agency leaders drained internal cash reserves and left the agency scrambling to borrow more externally. In late June, agency leaders restructured a \$50 million line of credit from the Oregon Treasury, narrowly avoiding default by extending the repayment period for half the loan until April. Treasury has expressed doubt about its willingness to lend to the department in the future.

In the meantime, the Department of Administrative Services has been covering the agency's payroll — so far

to the tune of \$18 million. The forestry department also has tapped the financial reserves of its state and private forests programs for another \$42 million.

All those monies need to be repaid, and agency leaders acknowledge that the financial squeeze is hampering work in other programs. They have put a temporary freeze on all nonessential purchases to conserve cash, including spending on computer and motor pool, travel and training.

In a letter sent Friday to State Forester Peter Daugherty and forestry board Chair Tom Imeson, Brown said that as a result of an agency push this summer, it had reconciled all of its bills from the 2013 and 2014 fire season.

"However," she wrote, "it is imperative that the remaining accounting backlog be cleared expeditiously."

The letter said an indepen-

dent contractor is being hired to help address the situation, and it would be supported by additional staff from the Chief Financial Office and the Department of Administrative Services. The financial oversight team will receive regular reports from the contractor and is expected to meet for about six months.

"Time is of the essence and this team will meet regularly based on need beginning the week of October 28," Brown wrote.

Delays in fire cost reimbursements from federal agencies have been a problem for some time. The cash flow implications were called out by state auditors in 2016. Agency leaders said the problem reached crisis proportions after back-to-back years of large fire costs piled up, and a belated realization that it simply didn't have enough staff to deal with the problem. That work involves digging through boxes of

old shift tickets and lists of equipment used on fires, reviewing them against cost-sharing agreements, auditing the results and submitting the claims.

False alarm at Brooklyn School

Baker School District officials have disconnected an alarm system at Brooklyn Elementary School after a false alarm Tuesday afternoon at the school, which houses kindergarten through third-grade students.

Baker School District 5J officials along with officials from Alpine Alarm are investigating why the alarm system was activated.

"The alarm system at Brooklyn will be disconnected until we have a clear understanding as to how it was activated and we have full confidence that the system will function as designed," Superintendent Mark Witty said Tuesday.

Around 2:15 p.m. Tuesday, Baker County Dispatch received an alarm at Brooklyn, 1350 Washington Ave., according to a press release from the School District.

Officers were dispatched from the Baker City Police Department. Baker County Sheriff's Office and the Oregon State Police also responded to the school.

Officers searched the school and quickly determined there was not an active threat on campus, according to the press release. Upon learning that the campus was secure, Baker School District officials reopened Brooklyn Elementary School for normal activities.

Witty thanked Brooklyn staff and emergency responders.

"The professionalism exhibited by our staff and the Emergency Services Team was admirable," he said. "We are grateful for the collaboration between multiple emergency services agencies and the Baker School District. Each organization brings critical skills that enhance the safety of students and staff."

Officer Lance Woodward of the Baker City Police echoed Witty's sentiments.

"I am proud of the way Brooklyn Elementary students, staff and parents handled this stressful situation," Woodward said. "Students, staff and parents kept their cool and responded exactly as they had been trained, which enabled law enforcement officers on scene to effectively complete their tasks and quickly return Brooklyn Elementary to normal school activities."

Brown: Refugees welcome

SALEM (AP) — Oregon Gov. Kate Brown has responded to President Donald Trump's executive order giving state and local governments the authority to refuse to accept refugees.

Brown said in a video posted Monday on Twitter that refugees are welcome in Oregon, and noted that it is a sanctuary state.

The Democratic governor said resettlement is a lifeline that America provides to the world's most vulnerable refugees.

Trump's Sept. 26 executive order says that within 90 days, the secretary of state and the secretary of health and human services must develop and implement a process by which a state and the locality's consent to the resettlement of refugees is taken into account.

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