

# A tale of two wolf shootings

An Eastern Oregon man who accidentally shot a protected wolf near Prairie City may be able to take solace in the outcome of a nearly identical case last year in Washington state.

On Oct. 12, 2014, 38-year-old Jonathan Rasmussen notified state authorities that he had accidentally shot a wolf in a farm field southwest of Pullman, Wash. Wolves in Washington state are protected under the state Endangered Species Act. Rasmussen was initially charged with taking a state endangered species, a gross misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$5,000 fine.

Whitman County, Wash., district attorney Denis Tracy had a tough choice to make, whether to prosecute Rasmussen to the maximum extent of the law — which would be legally correct but patently unfair — or seek a more even-handed outcome.

He chose the latter, and in September of this year reached an agreement with Rasmussen’s lawyer in which the hunter would forfeit his rifle and pay \$100 in court costs and vow to commit no further game violations for six months.

Short of dropping the case altogether, this was about the best conclusion that could have been reached.

Fast forward to last week in Oregon.

Brennon D. Witty, 25, was charged with killing an endangered species after he accidentally shot a wolf on private property south of Prairie City. He was also charged with hunting with a centerfire rifle without a big game tag, Harney County District Attorney Tim Colahan said. He is handling the case because the district attorney in Grant County, where the accident happened, knew the defendant’s family. Each charge is a Class A

misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$6,250 fine.

Witty notified authorities immediately and told them he had been hunting coyotes and accidentally shot the wolf.

The similarities between the facts of these two cases are striking, and the outcomes should be, too.

The federal Endangered Species Act and its state counterparts were written in an effort to bring species back from the brink of extinction. Wolves are not teetering near extinction, or anywhere close to it. Tens of thousands of wolves live in Canada and Alaska and hundreds live in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming after they were transplanted there and multiplied in number.

Now wolves are spilling into Washington state, Oregon and Northern California. Any wildlife biologist would agree that wolves are thriving in the Northwest. Their numbers are increasing, as are the number of breeding pairs. The loss of one or two wolves to accidents in no way endangers them. The idea that someone who accidentally shoots a wolf and then notifies the authorities of his mistake should be criminally prosecuted completely misses the purpose of the state and federal laws, which are targeted at those who kill endangered species on purpose.

It is common for those who commit a crime and then cooperate with authorities to get lighter sentences.

In light of the realities of the wolf populations in the Northwest and the fact that sometimes people make mistakes, prosecutors would best serve the public by making sure the punishment matches the crime.

In these cases, the lighter the sentence, the better.



# Thankful for farmers and ranchers at Thanksgiving

By Cyndie Shearing  
For the Blue Mountain Eagle

The American Farm Bureau’s 30th annual informal price survey of classic items found on the Thanksgiving dinner table revealed this year’s cost is \$50.11, a 70-cent increase from last year’s average of \$49.41.

The big ticket item — a 16-pound turkey — came in at \$23.04 this year. That’s about \$1.44 per pound, an increase of less than 9 cents per pound or a total of \$1.39 more per whole turkey, compared to 2014.

Concerns about the supply of two favorite holiday foods — turkeys and pumpkins — turned out to be just a blip on the radar screen. Plentiful supplies of both are available at reasonable prices to grace our holiday tables.

As we turn to cooking and eating special meals at this time of year, exploring what farmers and ranchers have to say about how they produce food for our tables adds a little spice to our food-related conversations.

Don Steen, a turkey farmer in Missouri, has been working on his farm since 1973.



Cyndie Shearing

“There are both hen and tom turkeys. A hen is a female and a tom is a male,” explains Steen.

Water is very important to a turkey’s survival. Poultry — turkeys, chickens, ducks and other fowl — need to be able to drink water at all times. The Steens’ turkeys eat a corn, soybean and mineral mix made at a local feed mill.

The Steens have a high level of biosecurity on the farm to protect the turkeys. Cars and trucks are washed when entering and exiting the farm. Don and his wife even wear special clothing in the barns to protect the turkeys.

Pumpkin farmer Harriet Wegmeyer of Virginia was a guest on Emeril Lagasse’s cooking show. She and her husband plant pumpkins in early summer and harvest through mid-October. In winter they care for the land by planting cover crops to add nitrogen to the soil.

“Harvesting pumpkins is a hard job, because all of the picking must be done by hand and some of them

are very heavy,” Wegmeyer says. Being a farmer is a year-round job but one that she finds exciting.

“Each season there is something new going on at the farm,” according to Jeff LeFleur, a cranberry farmer in Massachusetts. “Our goal is to take good care of the farm for future generations,” he says.

Many people believe that cranberries grow under water, but they do not. The bogs where cranberries grow are actually dry during most of the season. Water is used to help with the harvest and to protect the berries from the cold. Water also helps the cranberries grow.

If you’ve ever wondered why cranberries float, LeFleur has the answer.

“The cranberries float to the top because there are air pockets inside them,” he explains.

Order a copy of “Farm a Month: Where Does Our Food Come From?” from the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture to learn more about Steen, Wegmeyer, LeFleur and other food producers.

Cyndie Shearing is director of internal communications at the American Farm Bureau Federation.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Syrian immigrants worry legislator

Dear Editor:

I write to express my profound concern regarding the fate of those refugees expected to arrive in the United States from war-torn Syria.

While I have the deepest empathy for these families’ desperate situation, I am concerned by reports of a disproportionate number of single, combat-aged men among the prospective immigrants. It seems no proper means of vetting these individuals have been employed and, as we have seen, persons with ill-will or bad intent have secreted themselves among the refugees — to devastating effect.

I recognize that immigration is the province of the federal government, and, by and large, the states are not directly involved with resettlement of refugees. However, I hope Gov. Kate Brown will refuse to cooperate in the resettlement of un-screened refugees, or, at minimum, delay resettlement until such time as we know whom, precisely, we are welcoming to Oregon.

I hardly need remind you that our first and foremost responsibility is to the people of Oregon. Their safety is paramount. Should the actions of the federal government threaten the safety and security of our citizens, we must muster the courage to say, “No.” Know that Gov. Brown would have my unyielding support should she elect to take such a stand.

While compassion would have us act quickly, common sense tells us we must not act in haste or without regard for our safety. The governor must ensure that all necessary precautions are taken to protect our citizenry from terror attacks as we recently have seen in Beirut and Paris.

Carl Wilson  
Deputy Leader  
House Republicans  
Grants Pass

### Governor has ability to reject refugees

Dear Editor:

In reference to the Nov. 18 Blue Mountain Eagle, a small article penned by Portland Democrat Paris Achen stated her LEGAL opinion that “Governors have no authority to reject Syrian refugees....” Our supposedly unbiased Blue Mountain Eagle needs to apologize for this extremely misleading comment that has no basis in law.

Each state has the sovereign authority to defend citizens against a federal government that fails to protect them. Writers for this paper can make up law if they wish to honor the Oregon government officials who support Obama’s WAR by Islamist Terrorists BUT should first change the name of the paper to the “Weekly Communist Journal.”

Tom McHatton  
Long Creek

By Carl Sampson  
Blue Mountain Eagle

One of my favorite spots in Grant County is atop the ridge near the airport overlooking John Day. From there, I can see much of the community nestled in the valley.

Off to the east, cattle are lowing in a green pasture. Baseball diamonds lie ready for the first hits of spring. The rodeo and fair grounds are buttoned up for the winter. White church steeples reach skyward.

This is a community at ease with itself.

By any measure, it’s been a difficult year. The wildfires that marched up the canyon, destroying all in their path, threatened the community but not its resolve. Those whose homes and property fell victim to the flames found help and comfort in the generosity of their neighbors and friends.

I like mathematics. It helps tell a story that cannot easily be told any other way. Consider these numbers: 7,180, 9.1, 35,051, 43 and 244,615.31.

In Grant County, 7,180 people live. It is a shrinking number. Since 1950, when the population peaked

at 8,239, the number of county residents has decreased as the economy has faced challenge after challenge. The mills have struggled and other businesses have not been able to replace those economic drivers. The 9.1 percent seasonally adjusted local unemployment rate as of September was the highest in the state and more than 50 percent higher than the unemployment rate in Portland and the Willamette Valley.

The average per-household income of \$35,051 signifies how much each household brings in annually. That’s \$17,000 less than the median household income in Multnomah County.

The number 43 is the saddest number. It’s the number of homes lost to wildfires this year in Grant County.

If 43 is the saddest number, 244,615.31 is the most miraculous. That’s the number of dollars donated to victims of the wildfires.

That means, in the county with the highest unemployment rate in the state, \$34 was contributed by every man, woman and child. If you consider the 3,319 households in the county, \$74 was contributed by each.

Every so often, life knocks you

to your knees. No matter how tough you are or how prepared you are, something comes along that leaves you at loose ends. That’s when your neighbors, friends — and total strangers — pitch in to help you get back on your feet.

That’s when miracles happen.

People such as Jason and Amanda Wright and their daughter Carle know about that. They lost everything to the fires. Their home, clothes, furniture — everything. Yet through the generosity of the community and other guardian angels — including Kathy Stewart, who offered them the use of a furnished house — they are getting back on their feet.

The people of Grant County are known for their resilience, for how they bounce back from misfortunes, large and small. Now they are also known for their generosity.

When I stand atop that ridge overlooking the valley, I see more than the natural beauty. I see the beauty of the people who live here.

Carl Sampson is managing editor of the Capital Press, an agricultural newspaper and website. He was in John Day helping out at the Blue Mountain Eagle.

## WHERE TO WRITE

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