

# 'I screamed, pulled my rifle up and I shot'

By Eric Mortenson  
EO Media Group

The Oregon elk hunter who shot a protected gray wolf believes he would have been mauled or killed if he hadn't fired when it ran at him.

Brian Scott is being roasted on social media and criticized by biologists and activists who question his story.

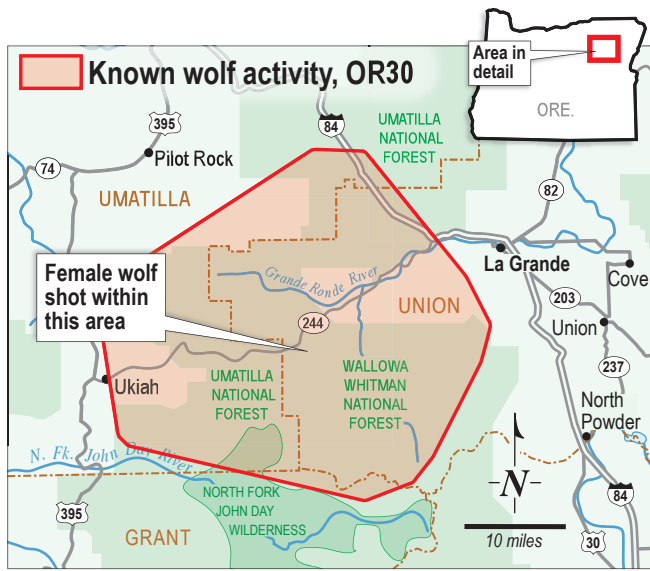
An alliance of 18 conservation groups sent a letter to Gov. Kate Brown requesting that Oregon State Police reopen the case, with independent oversight from the Office of the Attorney General and full cooperation from the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife.

They've keyed in on the bullet's trajectory, which passed through the wolf's shoulders, perhaps indicating it was standing broadside to Scott instead of running directly at him.

Scott said he can't explain it and doesn't know if the wolf perhaps veered sideways as he fired. Scott said he has replayed the moment in his mind countless times and always concludes he did what he had to do.

"I've got to live with what I did for the rest of my life," Scott said in an hour-long phone interview with the Capital Press. "I killed a wolf. It makes me almost nauseous to think about that moment."

"I take no pride in this at all," he said. "The only thing I'm happy about is I made it



Source: Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife

Alan Kenagal/Capital Press

home to my wife and children."

Scott, 38, lives in Clackamas, a suburb of Portland. He and his wife have two elementary school-age children, and he owns a small business. He said he has hunted since he was a boy in Texas and described himself as a "meat hunter," someone who eats what they kill. On Oct. 27 he was on his third day of hunting elk in ODFW's Starkey Wildlife Management Unit west of La Grande, in Northeast Oregon.

Scott said he was in fog-shrouded timber and intermittently saw animals moving around him, but wasn't sure if he was seeing a cougar, coyotes or something else. He made his way out of the fog to a ridge top and sat for perhaps 25 minutes, then walked out into a meadow. Two wolves emerged from the fog to his left, looked

at him, then headed in what he described as a flanking move behind him. A third wolf came running directly at him.

"I screamed, got it in my (scope) crosshairs, saw fur and pulled the trigger," Scott said. He said he whirled around, fearing the other two would attack, but saw them running away. He heard a fourth wolf howl nearby, and believes a pack was around him. ODFW has not officially designated a pack in that area; instead referring to it as territory of a colored wolf known as OR-30 and his mate. The wolf Scott shot, an 83-pound female, might be their offspring.

Badly shaken, Scott returned to his hunting camp about a mile away and told companions what had happened. They went to the site, confirmed it was a wolf and Scott called OSP and ODFW.

A casing from Scott's 30.06 rifle was found 27 yards from the carcass. The Union County district attorney's office in La Grande reviewed the case and decided not to press charges. An OSP spokesman said evidence at the scene backed Scott's story and said the fact that he self-reported killing the wolf was "compelling."

Scott, who was hunting alone at the time, said he could have hidden the wolf's carcass and told his companions back at camp that the gunshot they heard was him firing at an elk and missing.

"I feel like I did the right thing," he said. "I reported it immediately and was ready to face public scrutiny."

That has surely been the case. On social media and in comments to online news articles, posters have called Scott a liar, coward and an irresponsible hunter.

Carter Niemeyer, a retired U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist who is considered one of the nation's top wolf experts, said he didn't believe Scott's story because of the bullet's path. "That's a broadside shot," he told the Capital Press.

He and others said wolves are afraid of humans. People in such situations should make their presence known, shout, throw things or, if armed, fire a shot into the ground. Niemeyer said people venturing into the forest should carry bear repellent spray, which would work on wolves, cougars or coyotes.

Activists point out that wolves have not harmed anyone

since they re-entered Oregon and the state established a management plan. At the end of 2016, ODFW confirmed 112 wolves in Oregon; the actual number is presumed to be higher.

Rob Klavins, Northeast Oregon representative for the conservation group Oregon Wild, said he's encountered wolves several times in Wallowa County without harm to his hiking party or his dogs, which he keeps on leash in wolf territory.

"This person may have felt fear, but since wolves returned to Oregon no one has so much as been licked by a wolf, and that's still true today," he said.

Derek Broman, an ODFW carnivore biologist, said wolves often travel in pairs or packs, and seeing several together does not necessarily mean they were in a hunting formation.

He said wolves are "couraging" hunters, meaning they take down prey by chasing, repeatedly biting and wearing down elk, deer or cattle. They will approach stealthily and charge, seeking to attack in habitat that allows them to move easily, Broman said.

Broman said animals in the wild usually avoid people, and wolf attacks on humans are extremely rare. People faced with a wolf should not run, he said, because that would trigger an innate, evolutionary chase response.

Animals have evolved to recognize certain prey, and humans are "something completely different" to predators, he said.

"On a minute-by-minute basis, wildlife is trying to survive," Broman said. "If they

don't have a 90 percent chance of success, they're not going to give it a go. Cougars are so powerful they could do anything, but they don't."

"For a wolf to come near is not totally unheard of, and it's not necessarily concerning," he said. "We don't know what the animal was keying in on, or if it was keying in on anything at all."

Scott said critics should put themselves in his shoes.

"I felt I had run out of time," he said. "I'm a dog owner, I grew up on a ranch, I know how fast dogs are. Twenty-seven yards gave me seconds to react."

Scott said he doesn't demonize wolves; he considers them majestic animals. He said hunters and others going into the wild should be aware they are more likely now to encounter wolves. He thinks ODFW should do more to educate the public, an effort that could include posting warning signs at the approaches to known pack territory.

In the meantime, he's enduring ridicule and doubt about his account.

"This isn't me sitting there watching a wolf, taking a pot shot, then panicking, calling up Oregon State Police and making up an absurd story," he said.

"I was being charged by a wolf," he said. "The wolf is now dead, and I got to come home. Whether people want to buy that or not, I don't care."

EO Media Group reporter George Plaven contributed to this report.

## Tiny Burnt River School shines at national FFA convention

By Aliya Hall  
EO Media Group



Shelby Swindlehurst

Shelby Swindlehurst was one of the first to join Burnt River School's FFA chapter when she was a sophomore at the high school. Now a sophomore at Eastern Oregon University studying agricultural sciences, she was awarded one of the organization's top honors, the American Degree, at this year's FFA national convention.

The degree is awarded to FFA members who have "demonstrated the highest level of commitment to FFA and made significant accomplishments in their supervised agricultural experiences," according to the FFA website.

Less than 1 percent of

members are awarded the degree each year.

"At first I didn't realize how big it really was because I've never been around anyone who had it," she said. "Same with my advisor, but she knew it was a big deal. This year when I went to nationals, it was an eye-opener about how big an accomplishment it was."

Swindlehurst is the first in the Burnt River School District in Unity to receive this award.

Among the requirements for the American Degree are: receiving the State FFA De-

gree, being an active member for the past three years, having completed three years of systematic secondary school instruction in an agricultural education program, having graduated from high school, maintaining records to substantiate an outstanding supervised agricultural experience, earning at least \$10,000 and productively investing \$7,500 and having participated in at least 50 hours of community service.

Along with Swindlehurst, seven other students from Burnt River participated at the convention. Shayla Winton, Noah Ray, Stran Siddoway, Shea Swindlehurst and Tyler Belveal went for the experience, and Gustavo Ferrareto and Tim Barabas competed.



EO Media Group file photo

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden talks about the work he has done in Congress at a town hall meeting earlier this year in Boardman.

## Bills take different tacks to covering wildfire costs

Lawmakers resolve to end 'fire borrowing'

By George Plaven  
EO Media Group

If there is one thing Oregon Rep. Greg Walden and Sen. Ron Wyden can agree on, it is changing how the U.S. pays for battling increasingly large and expensive wildfires burning vast swaths of the American West.

The current practice, known as "fire borrowing," essentially forces the federal government to shift money away from fire prevention programs to foot the bill for firefighting, which topped a record \$2.5 billion in 2017.

Walden, Oregon's lone Republican congressman in Washington, D.C., has called fire borrowing an "endless cycle," while Wyden, a Democrat, recently described it as a "broken system." Both men are calling for a permanent fix to the problem, albeit through clashing proposals, where the similarities end.

Wyden, along with fellow Democratic Sen. Jeff Merkley, have joined a bipartisan group of senators pushing for the Wildfire Disaster Fund Act of 2017, which would make federal disaster funding available when firefighting costs exceed the 10-year average.

In a letter sent Tuesday to White House budget director Mick Mulvaney, the senators urged passing the bill as part

of a comprehensive disaster aid package. The Trump administration has committed to releasing that package sometime in the coming weeks.

"Year after year, the broken wildfire budgeting system shortchanges prevention funding, literally adding fuel to fires," Wyden said in a statement. "Putting an end to fire borrowing would at long last allow America to get ahead of the West's natural disasters — wildfires."

In October, the Senate did pass a \$36.5 billion emergency supplemental that included \$576.5 million to fight wildfires, in addition to \$18.7 billion for the Federal Emergency Management Agency Disaster Relief Fund, \$16 billion for National Flood Insurance Program debt forgiveness and \$1.27 billion for nutrition assistance for Puerto Rico.

That package, however, did not include a long-term fix for fire borrowing.

Walden, on the other hand, has publicly supported the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2017, which recently passed the House. Dubbed the Westerman Bill for its chief sponsor, Republican Rep. Bruce Westerman of Arkansas, the controversial bill also includes a provision for ending fire borrowing with FEMA dollars, but it goes on to address forest management by expediting certain logging projects and fast-tracking environmental review.

Speaking to reporters last week, Walden said the bill — a version of which has passed the House for five straight years —

will likely require some compromise in the Senate, though it has a good opportunity of reaching the President's desk under a more receptive administration.

Wyden, however, remains opposed to the bill which he said is "freighted with anti-environmental riders that create more problems than they solve, and that would likely harm forest health." He said the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act is the best way to fix fire borrowing and secure dependable funding for future restoration.

The Westerman Bill attempts to accelerate the pace and scale of that work by providing categorical exclusions for tree thinning projects up to 10,000 acres in size, or 30,000 acres if they are developed by a collaborative group. A categorical exclusion would help speed up environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act.

The bill also directs the Secretary of Agriculture to create a pilot program for resolving lawsuits filed against forest management projects in arbitration, as opposed to going to court, and limits plaintiffs' ability to recover their attorney fees under the Equal Access to Justice Act.

Opponents argue the bill caters to logging interests at the expense of forests, gutting both NEPA and the Endangered Species Act. The bill did pass the House in a bipartisan 232-188 vote, and has since been referred to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

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