



Courtesy photo/Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

A llama death in Union County has been ruled a 'probable' wolf depredation.

Dead llama ruled 'probable' wolf attack

Incident took place on private land in Union County

By George Plaven
EO Media Group

Wolves may very well be responsible for killing a 250-pound adult llama on a private forested pasture in Union County, though the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife stopped short of confirming the incident as a wolf attack.

Investigators instead ruled it a "probable" wolf attack, taking place just 10 miles away from where wolves with the Meacham pack preyed on

cattle at Cunningham Sheep Company earlier this summer.

The landowner found the dead llama Friday, Nov. 24, about 200 yards from the residence. The carcass was mostly intact, except most of the hide and muscle tissue along the right rear leg above the hock and around the anus had been consumed.

ODFW arrived the next day, and according to the agency's investigation report, the llama likely died sometime between late Wednesday, Nov. 22, and before dark Thursday, Nov. 23. At least two sets of wolf tracks were seen in the mud about 20 yards away, which were one to two days old. Investigators also documented trail camera photos taken about 300 yards from the carcass, showing a

wolf moving toward the area on Nov. 23.

However, wounds to the llama were not consistent with extensive wolf-caused injuries, the report went on to state. Taking all evidence into consideration, the agency determined that "there was sufficient evidence to confirm predation on the llama by a large predator, but not enough evidence to confirm which predator."

The same landowner also reported another dead llama earlier in the month, which had been largely consumed except for its neck, head and left shoulder. ODFW investigated Nov. 14, and determined there was no evidence of a predator attack at the scene. The cause of death is unknown.

Ritter land group receives big grant

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Ritter Land Management Team in Long Creek recently received a \$135,000 grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust with the goal of restoring ecosystem health and creating jobs in the John Day Basin.

Patti Hudson, the group's executive director, said the money will be used for staffing, maintaining a website and sustaining the group's operations for the next three years.

"It was a competitive grant, and it was fantastic that we got it," she said, noting that the trust sent people to look over the group's operation.

Formed in 2013 as a non-profit, the Ritter Land Management Team is a collaboration between private landowners in the Ritter and Lower Middle Fork John Day River sub-basin. Hudson said 30 of the 60 landowners in the 105,653-acre management area are active members of the group.

Invasive juniper trees

Using \$72,000 from Business Oregon and \$10,000 from the Oregon Community Foundation, the group acquired a portable sawmill and a telehandler this fall to turn western juniper trees into a marketable product.

The native trees have become an invasive species as they've spread across 9 million acres of Eastern Oregon rangelands, using up water in the dry landscape and crowding out native plants needed by wildlife and livestock.

Sustainable Northwest Wood, which has a lumber store in Portland, has already purchased a truckload of 4-by-6 and 6-by-6 juniper timbers produced by the Ritter mill, Hudson said. Juniper is a popular wood for landscaping timbers, she said.

"We don't have any employees at the sawmill yet, but we expect to hire two in the next six months and four to six more in the next two to three years," she said.

The group identified the need to ramp up the pace and scale of juniper removal in the area in an October 2015 Strategic Action Plan. They then obtained a grant from the state's Western Juniper Industry Fund to pay for a feasibility study to determine if sufficient supply and demand existed to sustain a



Contributed photo/Eric Sines

Caleb Morris, rancher and Ritter Land Management Team board member, runs the first log through the new mill in Ritter.

sawmill in Ritter.

According to the April 2017 report by TSS Consultants, a renewable energy, natural resource management and financial consulting firm in Sacramento, California, satellite imagery work by Portland State University was combined with slope analysis to determine that 66,871 green tons of saw logs and 57,318 green tons of harvest residuals could be economically produced from the area's juniper trees.

Supply and demand

The report suggested a 12- to 24-month harvest lead time would be helpful, providing time for the fallen logs to dry. Hudson said area ranchers have been dropping junipers that are now ready to mill. Instead of burning the entire tree, the trunk will be milled and the remaining limbs will be burned, Hudson said.

If 450 acres are treated annually, 105 truckloads of saw logs and 90 truckloads of fiber could be produced annually for the next 21 years, the report stated.

TSS Consultants also assessed the market for juniper products. Juniper is harder than ponderosa pine and has more nail strength than Douglas fir and ponderosa pine, and juniper "is considered splendid for machining and bending and is excellent for gluing and finishing," the report said.

With the closure of biomass power plants at Heppner and Prairie City, there is currently no local market for western juniper biomass chips, the report said. But juniper's resistance to rotting is especially important. A 1999 Oregon State University Forest Research Laboratory report showed that an untreated western juniper fencepost could last more than 30 years — longer than any other western tree species.

"This characteristic makes (western juniper) superb for outdoor applications such as posts, siding, decking and patio furniture," TSS Consultants said.

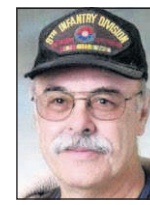
For the Ritter group, as it breaks into the wood-processing business, producing landscape timbers is a good start. But the report recommended that the group should diversify into two-inch boards, which "are in high demand today," Hudson said rough-cut 2-by-6 juniper is sometimes installed as flooring and finished in place by sanding.

Established in 1982, the Memorial Meyer Trust is among the largest private foundations in Oregon, with assets totaling about \$750 million. The trust has awarded grants and program-related investments totaling more than \$761 million to more than 3,600 organizations since it was founded. The trust focuses its work in Oregon on housing, education, the environment and building communities.

Staff shortage impacting local veterans program

Participants learn to deal with PTSD triggers

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle



Bob Van Voorhis



Katee Hoffman

Local veterans advocates are encouraging the Veterans Administration to restore a counseling program for veterans in Grant County with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Steve Bull, the former director of the VA clinic in Burns, traveled to John Day on Wednesdays to meet with about a dozen veterans suffering from the mental disorder. The program ended after about two years when Bull retired. Veterans are now expected to travel to Burns or Boise, Idaho, for similar counseling.

Bob Van Voorhis, an active supporter of local veterans in the John Day area, said he and Bull spent about a year organizing the PTSD meetings. He described Bull as a "man of faith" who had offered a "cowboy ministry" in the past.

Bull wasn't a vet, but he had spent a long career working one-on-one with vets and had maintained strong relationships with the vets he was helping. Generally a PTSD counselor for veterans should be a vet because of trust issues — vets will tell other vets some things they would never tell close friends or family members, Van Voorhis said.

Post-traumatic stress

Many people develop PTSD after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event such as combat but also natural disasters, motor-vehicle accidents or sexual assaults. The experience can result in upsetting memories, feeling on edge and trouble sleeping. It can also lead to erratic or even violent behavior — to oneself or others.

The VA estimates that 7 percent of Americans are affected by PTSD at some point in their lives, but it's more common among veterans. According to the Wounded Warrior Project website, more than 540,000 vets have been diagnosed with PTSD — including one in five veterans of the Iraqi War.

The VA established a National Center for PTSD in 1989 following a Congressional mandate. According to

their website, scientific and clinical interest in PTSD has rapidly grown in the past 25 years. PTSD is recognized as a major public health problem and behavioral health problem for veterans and active-duty personnel who are subject to the traumatic stress of war, dangerous peacekeeping operations and interpersonal violence.

Van Voorhis said he's contacted David Wood, the director of the Boise VA Medical Center since 2012, and Rep. Greg Walden about the need to restore the PTSD counseling program in John Day.

VA staff shortage

The problem stems from a staff shortage at the Burns facility that Wood is trying to address, Van Voorhis said. He said he'd give Wood to mid-December, but if no progress was evident toward resolving the problem, he would start up a letter-writing campaign.

Between 12 and 15 veterans participated in the John Day program, mostly Vietnam-era veterans but also some young vets, Van Voorhis said. Three had served as combat medics, an assignment that is particularly susceptible to PTSD because combat medics tend to "believe they can save anyone," Van Voorhis said. Combat infantrymen had a different mindset because they were trained to kill, he said.

Bull helped the vets identify things that might trigger PTSD — such as sounds, smells and certain kinds of objects — and then learn how to deal with those triggers. Vets who "checked the perimeter" before going to bed at night would learn to step back a second and take a breath instead of immediately reacting to PTSD triggers, Van Voorhis said.

Grant County has a higher percentage of vets than most people might think, Van Voorhis said. And many of them "have testosterone running out of their ears," so they aren't likely to admit they have PTSD — they are functioning citizens, he said.

But the quality of life for these people is not good — they're suffering even if it's not visible. There's no cure for PTSD, he said, but people

can learn to manage the disorder, and the John Day program had a positive impact on its members.

Options for vets

Katee Hoffman, the new Grant County Veteran Services Officer, told the Eagle she had dropped in on the group and was aware of the need to find a counselor and get the local program going again.

Hoffman said local veterans had some other options, including counseling over the telephone. She noted that some people prefer to be in a physical group setting and some did not.

Joshua Callihan, the public affairs officer at the Boise VA Medical Center, told the Eagle that Bull had offered the PTSD group counseling in John Day on his own.

"Steve did this as a VA employee, on VA time, but the services he provided in John Day were not services that the Department of Veterans Affairs had ever committed to providing in John Day," he said.

Callihan said the Boise center was actively recruiting a replacement for Bull at the Burns VA clinic. "Until we know who the replacement is, we will not know if they are willing or able to travel to John Day to continue providing the same services that Steve Bull did," he said.

Callihan noted that TriWest Healthcare Alliance offered a mental health provider for veterans in John Day. Under the Veterans Choice Program, eligible veterans in John Day can use the TriWest program because they live more than 40 miles from a VA facility with a full-time medical doctor on staff.

"That would mean via the VA's Veterans Choice Program, veterans could receive mental health services in the private sector in John Day," he said. "To schedule this care, veterans would call the phone number on their Veterans Choice Card and ask to be scheduled in that area."

The Veterans Choice Program was created by Congress in 2014 to expand the availability of medical services for eligible veterans. As one of two companies contracted under the program, TriWest offers mental health services to veterans through a network of 25,000 behavioral healthcare providers.

Hoffman noted that veterans could go to Community Counseling Solutions in John Day under the Veterans Choice Program, but they may not want to for fear of being "branded."



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