



Contributed photo/Oregon State Police

Two Grant County men were arrested in connection to unlawful taking of wildlife in Grant County.

Driver intentionally strikes, kills six pronghorn antelope near Christmas Valley

Incident follows Grant County poaching case from April

Blue Mountain Eagle

Six pronghorn antelope run down with a pickup on a roadway in Lake County on April 26 are the latest in a string of poaching thrill kills in Oregon.

The driver, Michael Scott Phillips, 48, of Christmas Valley, told authorities that he did it because he hates pronghorn, according to a press release from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Oregon State Police Fish & Wildlife Division troopers discovered a grisly scene of five does and one buck pronghorn antelope, their carcasses strewn along Fossil Lake Road near Christmas Valley. The buck's horns had been removed and taken as a trophy. One doe was eviscerated with a knife — her unborn fawn removed and placed on its mother's carcass. May is fawning season for antelope in Oregon. Any pregnant doe would have given birth within a month had they not been killed.

The division received the initial report of the crime through the Turn In Poachers Line. The caller reported hearing a man bragging about accelerating his pickup to hit several pronghorns, which were bunched together in the middle of the road. The man said he left the scene to get a hamburger, then returned later to retrieve the buck's horns.

Troopers served a search warrant on Phillips' residence in late May. They recovered the horns and other evidence linking Phillips to the crime, according to division Sgt. Lowell Lea. Phillips admitted that he accelerated to more than 60 mph to hit the antelope, and confirmed they were bunched together in the road. There was no evidence that he slowed down or tried to stop before striking the animals.

Phillips said he did it because he hates pronghorns, according to Sgt. Lea. Phillips was arrested on May 21. He is lodged in the Lake County Jail facing multiple charges including aggravated animal abuse, take/possession of antelope and waste of a game mammal.

"Not all poaching involves the use of a firearm," Sgt. Lea said. "This is not the first case of people poaching with a vehicle. And poaching takes opportunities away from hunters and others."

This incident comes after three Oregon men were cited in May for allegedly poaching 27 big game animals in

"WHEN PEOPLE POACH, THEY STEAL FROM ALL OF US. COMING ACROSS A HERD OF PRONGHORNS IS A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME EXPERIENCE THAT MOST AMERICANS WOULD HOLD AS A TREASURED MEMORY. INSTEAD, A POACHER HAS ROBBED THE ANIMALS OF THEIR LIVES AND EVERYONE ELSE OF THE EXPERIENCE."

—Yvonne Shaw, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife anti-poaching campaign coordinator

multiple counties over the past two years. A concerned citizen contacted the TIP Line to report the poaching ring. Restitution for the crimes, which occurred in Benton, Lane, Linn, Lincoln, Polk and Tillamook Counties, may top \$162,000.

In April, two men were charged with poaching a pronghorn buck, a branch bull elk and six buck deer over the past year in Grant County.

In July, the division identified a poaching hot spot in Columbia County, where two elk and a buck deer were shot over a period of three months near Weyerhaeuser property. All three animals were left to waste where they were shot, with little or no meat taken.

The Oregon Hunters Association operates the TIP Line. Callers receive a cash reward or hunting preference points if their report leads to a citation or arrest. The TIP Line rewards program is funded primarily through hunter restitution fees and fines. The reward for reporting a poached deer, elk or antelope is four preference points or \$500. Last year OHA awarded more than \$21,000 in rewards, and ODFW awarded 143 hunter preference points to people who reported to the TIP Line.

ODFW anti-poaching campaign coordinator Yvonne Shaw said the crimes reflect wanton disregard for wildlife, wildlife laws and fellow Oregonians.

"When people poach, they steal from all of us," Shaw said. "Coming across a herd of pronghorns is a once-in-a-lifetime experience that most Americans would hold as a treasured memory. Instead, a poacher has robbed the animals of their lives and everyone else of the experience."

Wildfire softball ends short summer season on top

Team played four tournaments over the summer

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Grant County Wildfire 16U softball team finished out their summer season just like they had hoped in a round robin tournament in La Grande Aug. 1, handily defeating Union County Lightning 10-1 and shutting out Central Oregon Crossfire 7-0.

"While the girls will move on and obviously play together again in high school, this was basically the end of Wildfire as we have known it," Wildfire head coach Zach Williams said.

Williams said the 16U team played in four tournaments this summer.

In their first tournament, the Nampa Shakedown, June 19-20, the girls blanked the Boise Storm 20-0 in their first game, fell to the Idaho Racers 19-3 in game two and bounced in the third game, beating Nampa Pride 17-4.

With a 2-1 record in pool play, the Wildfire ranked in the top half of the 16 teams and fell to the Idaho Crossfire, the team that won the tournament.

Williams said the team had the lead heading into the fourth inning "but ran out of fresh arms on the mound" to close it out.

In Pendleton June 27-28, the Wildfire went into the tourney 1-2 in pool play, beating UC Lightning 7-5 in the first outing, but then falling to Pendleton's OE fast-pitch team, 11-7, in game two and then again to Portland Rise, 17-8.

Williams said the girls notched a huge win they took down the top-seeded Vancouver Rampage, 11-8.

Drewsey Williams pitched a really good game, the coach said. He said the team played solid defense behind her.

"We hit the ball really well, from the top and to the bottom of the lineup" he said.

Williams said the four girls in the bottom of the lineup were seven for 11 in plate appearances.



Contributed photo/Tanni Wenger

Grant County Wildfire 16U softball team member Drewsey Williams pitches in a game this summer.

In the championship game, Williams said, the team ran out of pitching and fell to Pendleton's OE fast-pitch, 23-10.

The girls traveled to Fruitland, Idaho, July 10-11 and won two out of their first three games, beating Idaho Crossfire's Graham team 4-3, but then falling to their Davies team 4-3. In the third game the girls won 11-3 against the Boise Storm.

The girls lost the semifinal game 9-8 to the Idaho Racers, a team that, Williams said, are in the championships in nearly every tournament.

"The girls were really amped up, they had played a great game and just couldn't hold on, Williams said. "The coach for the Racers approached our girls after the game and told them how impressed he was with them and told them that he would love to get to play them more."

Williams said there are many "amazing" things that have come from this team, from the camaraderie and family mentality, to learning to genuinely care about their teammates.

"They weren't always successful, but they have had so many opportunities that it will serve them well as they move on to the next stage of their softball careers," he said.

GRANT COUNTY WILDFIRE 16U

Roster

Addy Northway	2
Reece Jacobs	9
Savannah Watterson	1
Halle Parsons	14
Sivanna Hodge	7
Bailey McCracken	15/13
Ava Gerry	10
Drewsey Williams	4
Lauren Wenger	12
Jaydika Anderson	11
Lilly Rockhill	16
Madi Seavert	10/7
(pickup player from La Grande)	
Ava Ellis	6
(pickup player from Pilot Rock)	

Coaches and volunteers

Zach Williams, Levi Watterson, Ray Wenger and Marissa Williams

Prairie City gym overhaul nearly complete

Walls, roof, bleachers, floor to be improved

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Seismic-retrofitted walls, a new roof, new bleachers, a resurfaced floor and a new paint job are some of the changes students can expect at the Prairie City School gym this fall.

Prairie City Superintendent Casey Hallgarth said the construction in general at Prairie City School has been exciting, especially with the addition of new roofs for the gym and cafeteria, addressing problems with leaks.

"I'm extremely excited for the community to come see the finished product here," Hallgarth said. "CB construction has been nothing but on top of the project and hats off to them too."

Hallgarth said the bleachers will be a great addition since they will be safer than the previous set. The new bleachers will provide railings and handrails going up the aisles to keep people from falling.

He said the bleachers will be easier to adjust to accommodate for people and be more ADA-compliant.

"We've had a few peo-



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

Prairie City School's gym has seen many changes this summer with seismically retrofitted walls, a new roof, new bleachers and resurfaced floor.

ple, elderly, that are in wheelchairs, and there are two sides where they can sit with our old bleachers, which is one end or the other," Hallgarth said. "Now, we have the capability to push in portions of the bottom row to where they can sit in the center."

The walls of the gym are being seismically retrofitted by receiving carbon fiber strips with high tensile strength on both sides of the walls.

"When they do that, they have to paint the walls after finishing, so what's great is we get to decide what colors we get to have," Hallgarth said.

The inside of the gym will be painted with 12 feet of black going from the bottom

of the floor up, then a three feet orange strip and then white the rest of the way up, including the ceiling. On the outside, the building will be painted a dark gray all around.

The agriculture teacher, Lindy Cruise, has been making a sign for the front entrance of the gym stating "Home of the Panthers" with the school's CNC machine, which was received through the Career Technical and Education program.

The letters are being cut out of 12-gauge metal at just under 4 feet tall and about 2 feet wide, according to Hallgarth. He said the letters are going to be orange and sit off the wall a little bit so they can be backlit.

Prairie City School Dis-

trict was awarded a \$2.5 million grant from the state's Seismic Rehabilitation Grant Program to fund this project.

"I wrote a seismic grant two years ago when I first got the job," Hallgarth said. "We got it, and we partnered with ZCS engineering who helped us with the grant process."

The project is projected to be finished in the middle of August, but Hallgarth said the team is about two and a half weeks ahead of schedule so there is a possibility the project will be completed early.

Hallgarth said they are also adding livestreaming capabilities to the gym, which they already set up at the football field. They partnered with the National Federation of State High School Associations and Pixelot Company as a pilot school to provide this option.

"We got two cameras and all the hardware that comes with it, and we can livestream all of our events at the football field, the track area and in our gym," Hallgarth said.

This will allow Prairie City to provide streams for both sporting events and school activities such as assemblies, Christmas programs and more on the school's new website, pcsd4.com.

"That gym is the hub for the city for a natural disaster, so safety-wise and cosmetically, it's going to be great," Hallgarth said.

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