



Contributed photo/ODFW

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Officials investigate 'mystery' of five dead wolves found Feb. 9 in Union County

Carcasses being examined to determine cause of death

By George Plaven
EO Media Group

Officials continue to investigate how five wolves found Feb. 9 in Union County died.

On Feb. 9, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife reported a GPS collar on a wolf emitted a "mortality signal" in the Mount Harris area near La Grande. Officers with the Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Division found five wolves dead.

The carcasses were taken to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service forensic lab to determine a cause of death. Results have yet to be released.

OSP Capt. Tim Fox said he could not immediately provide additional details about the dead wolves, such as their size, sex and pack. Roblyn Brown, wolf program coordinator for ODFW, also declined to comment, citing the pending investigation.

Oregon has a minimum wolf population of 158, as of the most recent ODFW survey in 2019, though the actual number is likely higher. Most packs are concentrated in the state's northeast corner, including Union County where the five dead wolves were found.

Kathleen Gobush, Northwest program director for the conservation group Defenders of Wildlife, said the deaths were suspicious, though without knowing the cause of death, they cannot say whether poaching may have been to blame.

"It highlights the pressing need for a thorough investigation, for sure," Gobush said.

Gobush, who is in Seattle, said she has never heard of so many wolves found dead at once in either Oregon or Washington.

"We're all waiting to hear what the cause of death is," she said. "A lot of this is a mystery."

Rodger Huffman, a rancher in Union, and wolf committee co-chairman for the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, said the relationship between wolves and local producers remains contentious, due in part to what he describes as "shoddy" management of the species.

Oregon's Wolf Management and Conservation Plan allows for ranchers and wildlife officials to legally kill wolves that prey on livestock if they reach a certain number of "confirmed" depredations within a certain time period, and non-lethal deter-

rents have failed.

But Huffman said it is frustratingly difficult to "confirm" a wolf depredation, unless it is found and reported immediately, leaving ranchers in a difficult predicament.

"The wolf population is not a celebrated thing in cattle country," he said. "It's frustration, there's no doubt about it."

Wolf poaching is not unheard of in Eastern Oregon. Two incidents were reported last year in neighboring Baker County — one in late September, a breeding male from the Cornucopia Pack, and another in late October, a sub-adult female from the Pine Creek Pack.

Gobush said apex predators like wolves play an important role in the ecosystem, and should be protected.

Defenders of Wildlife also supports a bill in the Legislature that would help crack down on poachers, Gobush said. Senate Bill 841 would appropriate \$1.6 million from the state general fund to support the Department of Justice's Environmental Crimes

and Cultural Resources Enforcement Unit.

The bill, sponsored by Democratic Sens. James Manning Jr., Chris Gorsek and Deb Patterson, is scheduled for a public hearing on April 5.

Valley View under new management

John Day assisted living facility acquired by Portland-based Sapphire

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Valley View Assisted Living is under new management and got a slight name change.

Now known as Sapphire at Valley View after being acquired by Portland-based Sapphire Health Services, Valley View is one of almost 20 assisted living facilities the company manages across Oregon and Washington.

Lisa Hilty, vice president of operations for community-based care, said Sapphire put the staff through training and implemented new day-to-day operations in a "shift" from how Valley View operated in the past.

She said all assisted living facilities operate under the same administrative rules in Oregon, but how they get to that goal is slightly different.

Hilty said the Valley View staff has been "open and eager" with the new direction.

"The team has just been a true joy and are incredible," she said. "They've been really excited with the level of involvement and support."

She said she or a regional director have been in John Day "multiple times a month" since becoming involved with Valley View.

Hilty said Stephanie Rodriguez, longtime Valley View executive director is "incredible," and the staff is "passion-driven."

Hilty, who began her career in senior housing and health care in the early 1990s, said she noticed right away the Valley View residents were happy and "well cared for" when Sapphire first toured the facility.

"We knew that (Valley View) could get to the next level with the right kind of support," she said.

In getting to the next level, she said a goal is to implement a memory care program over the next six months.

Hilty said the Sapphire-branded program, dubbed "Sapphire Radiant," is about ensuring residents have a purpose in their lives. She said, whether gardening or having a role within the community, such as delivering the mail, it is about the resident feeling purposeful and helpful.

Hilty said there is another program around sights and smells that has been successful. Another goal, she said, is to paint and add new carpet to the apartments within the next six months.

"That'll be an exciting refresh for each of these units," she said.

She said it will be about supporting the staff with the tools to do an incredible job to where residents "feel like there's no place better for them to live." Hilty said this includes menu planning and activities.

Hilty said Sapphire, with just under 20 locations, is "fairly small" for their industry. Many companies, she said, get very large, and that is not their goal. She said the company is very "intentional" and "purposeful" about their growth and the locations of the communities they acquire.

"Part of our due diligence process," she said, "is where's it located, and how long will it take for me to drive."

As Grant County health officials continue to try and get in front of a surge of 29 positive COVID-19 cases this month, with infections at a nursing home 30 miles away in Prairie City, Valley View as of Tuesday has managed to prevent the virus from spreading to residents.

Hilty praised Rodriguez and the rest of the staff for their diligence in ensuring that Valley View continues to prevent the virus from spreading to the care center.

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Applications due by April 16th.
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