

Mutilations

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This is the fifth case of a cattle mutilation in Wheeler County in the past 20 months. Nearby Harney County has had five cases in the past four years, two of which happened this year, in May and July.

According to FBI records, it's not just an Oregon problem. Since the 1970s, thousands of killings and mutilations of cattle have happened across the U.S.

The cases, officials say, usually look "eerily similar": A cow or bull is found dead in a remote area with no indication of how a suspect might have gained access to the property. Typically, no footprints, tire tracks or fingerprints are found. There's little to no spilled blood and no visible puncture wounds, bullets or strangulation marks.

In other words: a mystery. Holmes, the deputy on Brown's case, is also the primary investigator on the four other recent mutilation cases in Wheeler County and said all five cases looked "about the same."

The deputy, however, declined to comment on further details about the August



Contributed photo/Clancy Roth

A cow was found dead and mutilated in early 2020 at Bar DR Land and Cattle, a Deschutes County ranch in Hampton.

case, saying he's tracing some specific clues and doesn't want a suspect to know.

As a hypothetical example, if suspects knew he recognized their tire tracks, they might ditch their getaway car.

"I've got a few leads I need to look into that I can't talk about yet," said Holmes.

All five recent mutilation cases in Wheeler County are still open and under investigation, as are the most recent five cases in Harney County.

Holmes advises farmers and the public to be on the lookout for people or vehicles that appear suspicious and to write down license plate numbers and vehicle descriptions.

In a recent statement, the Harney County Sheriff's Office similarly invited community members and livestock owners "to be vigilant and watch for suspicious persons or vehicles where livestock (are)."



Contributed photo/Wheeler County Sheriff's Office

Rancher David Hunt found a cow dead and mutilated in July 2020, with her tongue, genitals and reproductive organs cut out — and she was placed in an upright position.

Mystery

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conclusion about why the cow died.

Almost the whole of the cow's tongue — at least a couple pounds of flesh — was missing.

The wound severed two arteries at the base of the tongue, and Ratliff said a veterinarian told him that a cow with that injury would bleed to death relatively rapidly.

That was the only injury that happened prior to the cow's death, Ratliff said.

The carcass was undisturbed with one exception — birds had pecked out one eyeball.

He estimated the cow died either late on Aug. 24 or early on Aug. 25.

Ratliff said tracking conditions were "phenomenal," with a large area of dry, soft dirt around the carcass.

He didn't find any predator tracks, but there were tracks



EO Media Group file photo

Cattle graze in Eastern Oregon.

from deer, elk, mice, squirrels and birds. There were also human boot tracks — presumably from the ranch manager who found the carcass.

The carcass was near the upper Fox Creek road, east of Lookout Mountain in eastern Baker County.

But Ratliff said the evidence suggests that the cow

sustained the fatal injury on or near the road, about 100 yards from where the carcass was found. That evidence, in the main, is blood.

Copious quantities of blood.

"Buckets," Ratliff said.

There were multiple large patches of bloody ground, splashes of blood as high as 5 feet up in nearby trees and a blood trail between the road and the carcass.

Ratliff surmises that the blood was splashed onto the trees when the cow whipped

her head from side to side after the injury.

Tracking conditions were also good at the road, which was dry and dusty. Ratliff found ATV tracks on the road, but, as at the carcass site, no predator tracks.

Ratliff said, as he cut open and examined the carcass, he considered, and in turn discarded, multiple theories about the cow's demise.

He initially thought the cow might have been shot. But there was no bullet wound — no wound at all in the hide.

He wondered if the animal had an internal tumor that had burst. But the cow's lungs and heart appeared to have been healthy.

The mystery deepened when Ratliff examined the jaw and, for the first time, saw that most of the tongue was gone.

The wound was jagged, not the clean cut that a knife or other sharp implement would make, he said.

There were no tooth marks or other evidence of a predator.

Ratliff said he can't envision how a person could have removed such a large section of the tongue from a living cow.

Other possible explanations aren't much more plausible, he said.

Cows do curl their tongues around plants they're eating to rip the food loose, and Ratliff speculated that perhaps the cow's tongue had been entwined in vegetation and ripped that way.

But while that could cause a small wound, he said it hardly explains the removal of most of the tongue.

He also considered the possibility that the cow's tongue was caught in a trap.

Or that the cow bit off its own tongue.

Except cows don't have front teeth on the top of their jaw — there's just a hard plate. (They do have lower front incisors.)

As for the tongue itself, Ratliff didn't find it.

He said he didn't open the cow's stomach, so he can't say for certain that the cow didn't swallow the tongue.

"I cannot tell you what caused that cow to lose its tongue," Ratliff said.

Board

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mandate for students who are not willing to follow the mask order.

Uptmor asserted in the letter that the district would continue to fight for local control so that the decision to mandate masks could be a local one. Until that happens, he said, the district would follow the governor's mandate.

He writes to the parents that the state's hospitals are "currently overrun" with COVID-19 hospitalizations.

"It will be disappointing if our students are sent to school with the directive from parents to not wear a mask as politics has played enough of a role in our schools during this time of COVID," he writes.

Uptmor said, while he wrote the letter, it was not his intent to offend people in the community.

"I don't know yet how I can take that back and gain your trust again," he said, "but that will be what I'm working towards."

Uptmor apologized after the meeting in a separate letter posted on social media.

One parent told Uptmor, in the past, she felt "heard and understood" by him regardless of if she agreed with him. She said his letter stopped that dialogue.

She said he did not reply to an email she sent him, nor did the entire board reply to an email about the closed-door meeting.

"We are in this dark here," she said.

John Day Educator's Association

Cindy Dougharity-Spencer, a teacher at Grant Union High School and president of the John Day Educator's Association, said the association supports teaching and student learning.

"We support freedom," she said, "but we're not going to jeopardize our livelihoods to violate mandates."

According to the governor's mandate, educators and administrators face stiff penalties, including losing their teaching license, for defying the order.

The association, Dougharity-Spencer said, supports taking preventive measures, including cleaning, testing and wearing face coverings, but with appropriate accommodations.

She told the audience that the teachers union is working on how to get accommodations for people who do not want to vaccinate.

"We don't want to be the mask police," she said. "We encourage activities that keep our kids in school, and our classes open, and everyone learning. We are trying to work together, but we are not willing to risk our licenses to be in violation."

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