

# Hockensmith cuts deal in animal neglect case

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**  
Staff Writer

Hermiston rancher Michael Hockensmith will be charged with five counts of misdemeanor animal neglect and placed on probation for five years after nearly 200 malnourished cattle were discovered on his property in January.

Hockensmith was arraigned Monday. At his indictment Feb. 28 he was charged with 200 counts of animal neglect — 14 in the first degree and 186 in the second-degree, one count for each animal in the herd. At Monday's hearing, Hockensmith pleaded guilty to five counts of misdemeanor animal neglect, for five of the animals that died, but asked for counts 6 through 200 to be dismissed. In exchange for charges 6 through 200 being dropped, Hockensmith asked to be placed on bench probation, which means he cannot own domestic animals or livestock for five years.

Hockensmith's attorney, John Ballard, asked for two exceptions. One, that Hockensmith be allowed to keep one horse that he already owned, and that had been found by the sheriff's office to have been reasonably well cared for. The other, Bal-

lard asked permission for Hockensmith to be able to own and operate firearms, as he lives in a rural area.

Circuit Court Judge Eve Temple granted those two exceptions.

Deputy district attorney Jake Kamins, who for the past three years has specialized in animal cruelty cases, served as a special prosecutor for the case.

Although Hockensmith pleaded guilty to five counts of neglect, 17 animals from the herd died over the past few months. Ballard said five appeared to have been sick early on, when the winter storm hit.

"There are probably some other factors not worth getting into," Ballard said. "In summation, this is probably the most fair resolution, without getting into two to three days' trial."

Kamins said the five animals were largely symbolic of the other animals.

"There's nothing particularly egregious about those five," he said. "In a plea bargain situation, we're looking at the defendant taking responsibility for actions, and being held accountable in a way less than the maximum penalty. This was resolved very quickly. He took responsibility very quickly."

He added that nothing

would have been different had Hockensmith been charged with 50 counts of animal neglect.

While all the counts were initially classified as felonies, Kamins said the five to which Hockensmith pleaded guilty were reduced to misdemeanors.

"We agreed that because he was coming forward quickly, he didn't need to have felony charges on his record," Kamins said.

He added that no matter how many counts Hockensmith had been charged with, five years' bench probation was the maximum he could have

received for being barred from owning livestock.

"That's a good resolution for this case," Kamins said.

Hockensmith will also have to complete 80 hours of community service, and pay a \$130 misdemeanor fee, as well as \$100 for each count of animal neglect. He was initially sentenced to 180 days in jail, all of which Temple suspended.

Hockensmith did not make any comments during the hearing.

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# SUV theft in Hermiston leads to pursuit

Bradley Griffin-Hadley, 30, of Hermiston was arrested Wednesday, March 29, on counts of driving while suspended, malicious mischief, possession of a stolen vehicle and attempting to elude a police officer, according to Deputy Shanda Zessin of the Walla Walla County Sheriff's Department. He was lodged in the Walla Walla County Jail.

Law enforcement officials say Griffin-Hadley is suspected of stealing a 1999 gold Ford Explorer SUV from Hermiston and leading police on a car chase through Hermiston, Helix, Pendleton and Milton-Freewater before ending near

Burbank, Washington.

Lt. Chuck Byram of the Pendleton Police Department said an officer saw the vehicle, which had been reported stolen out of Hermiston earlier that morning, passing by on Highway 207 at 5:31 a.m., and the officer started following the vehicle.

A Tribal police officer attempted to stop the vehicle, which then fled, leading the officer on a chase on Highway 11.

Byram said the officer ended the pursuit after determining the operator was driving erratically.

Griffin-Hadley was arrested east of Burbank after running out of gas.



FILE PHOTO

A group of people enjoy a carnival ride during the 2015 Cinco de Mayo celebration in Hermiston.

## MOVE:

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The upside of moving to Butte Park is that there is room for additional carnival rides and vendors, plus a place to set up a fireworks show.

Beas Fitzgerald said Saturday's parade and entertainment will feature all sorts of traditional entertainers, including mariachi bands, horseback groups and dancers. The parade will begin at 1 p.m. at the parking lot for the Oxbow trail and travel east on Elm Avenue. Beas Fitzgerald said they are encouraging community members to show up with decorated children's bikes and costumed pets and join in the parade.

Later that night, a youth dance with a DJ will include a competition to win a car, followed by a fireworks show. Sunday night will feature a "big-name band" that Beas Fitzgerald said she can't announce yet.

"We want residents of the community to have a reason to come both days," she said.

In the days leading up to the event, organizers are holding a competition for Cinco de Mayo queen. Five young women have posted videos about themselves to the Hermiston Cinco de Mayo Facebook page, and the three that get the most likes by 8 p.m. on April 15 will be this year's Cinco de Mayo queen and two princesses.

Beas Fitzgerald said in years past a committee has chosen contestants via

essays and interviews, but this year to simplify things "we're just going to let the public take over."

The young women will participate in the Cinco de Mayo celebration, the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Peace Walk in January and serve as volunteers at future city events. Beas Fitzgerald said they will likely make appearances at events like the Umatilla County Fair too.

"I want them to have experience meeting with other young ladies like the Umatilla County Fair Court, and from the Pendleton Round-Up," she said.

After previous organizer Eddie de la Cruz moved, Beas Fitzgerald said it has been intimidating stepping up as chair of the Cinco de Mayo committee, which last year gained 501(c)3 nonprofit status. But she said fellow organizers Mark Gomolski, Alex Hobbs, Isela Osario and others have provided invaluable time and effort to pull it off.

"I'm getting really nervous," she said. "It's the first time for me leading this. But I know everything falls into place as long as there's people, food and music."

She said the committee hopes to create something that helps foster pride in heritage for young Latinos, but is also a fun, family-friendly event for people of all cultures.

"We want them to feel included, that there's no borders," she said.

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