

Hermiston animal sighting could be a bear, biologist says

ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald



Umatilla County Sheriff's Office/
Contributed Photo

A Umatilla County sheriff's deputy on Thursday, Oct. 21, 2021, shot this photo of a possible bear off Westport Lane in Hermiston.

A dark and fuzzy photo of a possible bear is circulating around social media, causing exhaustive argumentation. While some people believe the image in the photo is a bear, other people are not so sure.

Maybe it is a dog, they say. A few people even claim it is a calf.

A UPS Customer Care Center employee made the first report Thursday, Oct. 21, at 1 p.m. after he saw the animal near his work on Westport Lane, Hermiston.

A Umatilla County sheriff's deputy responded to the call, arrived on the scene and took photos that are now causing all the debate.

Steve Cherry, district wildlife biologist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, said a bear sighting is possible.

"You never know," he said.

The odds are not great of a black bear being seen where it was, but he would not rule it out. He has seen photos of the sighting, and he said "they all look like they could be a bear."

The nearest population of black bears lives around 30 miles away from the report of the sighting, Cherry said. That population lives toward the Blue Mountains, just outside Pendleton.

When young bears leave their mother, they sometimes wander as they search for a new home. Cherry said such a bear, right now, would be getting ready for hibernation and would be looking for a food source.

A stray bear, in this situation, could be attracted by trash cans. There would be few other sources for

food in the area, so it would likely move on to a different place.

Mark Kirsch, John Day watershed manager for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, said the presence of a bear in Hermiston would be "very atypical."

"I can't remember another one," he said.

Kirsch said he can't speak to the exact motivation that would drive a bear out of the mountains and toward the desert, but added animals' motivation to wander is "typically tied to their stomach."

People should not be worried about an attack, Cherry said. Bears, unless they are overly familiar with people, are afraid of us.

If people come face-to-face with a bear, they should "act big," Cherry said. They should stand tall and shout, keeping their eyes on the bear. Backing up is fine to do, but people should not turn and run. Such action may encourage bears to pursue.

Most times, bears will run from people when people do not act fearful in front of the bears.

EO Media Group reporter Bryce Dole contributed to this report.

East Penney Avenue project moves forward

Hermiston Herald

Hermiston is going forward with building East Penney Avenue's connection between Southeast Kelli Boulevard and Highway 395.

The Hermiston City Council at its meeting Monday night, Oct. 25, voted 6-0 to authorize accepting up to \$596,600 from the Oregon Department of Transportation's Immediate Opportunity Fund to develop and complete the road.

The city also has to provide a 50% match against the grant funding. The city has received \$1.9 million in federal American Res-

cue Plan funds, and should receive at least that in 2022. According to meeting documents, the city can use those funds to provide the 50% match.

The council voted 6-0 to approve the agreement with ODOT to accept the grant.

The next steps are for the engineering and design firm of Anderson Perry to work on the design in the next month or so. The city plans to advertise for bids from January to February 2022, select a bid and have construction going by the summer.

The council also returned to amending a pair of ordinances it tabled

at the last meeting. One is the city law regarding nuisances. The ordinance has several updates, including to a number of definitions and adds graffiti as a nuisance.

The update also clarifies the appeals process. In special circumstances when the council declares a nuisance the appeal would go to circuit court.

The council voted 6-0 to approve it and make it effective 30 days after the vote.

The second city law grants the code enforcement officer the authority to issue traffic citations, establishes a parade permit process and simpli-

fies bicycle regulations in downtown Hermiston.

City Manager Byron Smith said the staff brought this back to the council for feedback only from the council. The council gave several suggestions. City attorney Richard Tovey suggested it would be beneficial to allow enough time to incorporate the council's feedback to amendments and bring back a complete proposal at a future meeting. The council voted to table approval.

In related city business, the League of Oregon Cities announced Mayor Dave Drotzmann is the new treasurer for the league.

Man faces murder, more in 2020 Hermiston killing

EO Media Group

A suspect in the slaying of a man in Hermiston in 2020 is not getting out of the Umatilla County Jail anytime soon.

Keith Michael Beridon, 26, of La Grande, is on the hook for two counts to unlawful use of a weapon, one count of felon in possession of a firearm and one of second-degree murder in the homicide of Jesus Eli Lopez, according to state court records.

Lopez's body was found June 9, 2020, in his family's garage, accord-

ing to news reports. He died from a gunshot.

Umatilla County District Attorney Dan Primus said his office extradited Beridon from California. He is in jail without bail, where he will stay for the remainder of the case.

Beridon in September had a bail hearing. Circuit Judge Jon Lieuallen found the evidence showed a strong presumption that Beridon was responsible for the homicide and would not grant him bail, so he remains in custody, Primus said.

Primus said he can't speak to any of

the facts in the case, "only the posture of the case, where it's at in the court system." Officials have yet to publicly disclose any apparent motive in the case.

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said based on the investigation, Beridon is the lone suspect, but when detectives flew to Orange County, California, after his apprehension, possibly on an out-of-state warrant, he declined to talk.

Beridon's pretrial conference is scheduled for the afternoon of Nov. 19 at the Umatilla County Courthouse, Pendleton.

CORRECTION

The Page A9 story "Echo's Oktoberfest gives rare opportunity to local musicians," published Wednesday, Oct. 20, misidentified the hometown of Margaret Mayer and Alan Feves. They live in Pendleton.

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