

# 2008 Notable Law Enforcement Cases

## Casper Region

### GPS RADIO COLLAR PROVIDES EVIDENCE

Glenrock game warden Gary Boyd reports that Eldon Kio pled guilty to taking a buck white-tailed deer without a license, waste or abandonment of a big game animal, and taking an over limit of a big game animal. Eldon Kio was out hunting doe white-tail, when he shot a buck white-tail with a G.P.S. collar around its neck. This deer was part of the ongoing CWD study South of Glenrock. While not illegal to kill a collared deer, Eldon panicked about killing the buck on a doe license, cut the collar off the deer, threw the collar in the bushes and dragged the deer into a low spot to hide it. Converse County Judge Vincent Case fined Eldon \$1,600 dollars for the 3 violations, \$4,000 restitution for the buck deer, \$36 restitution to fix the G.P.S. collar, for a total of \$5,636, and suspended all hunting and fishing privileges for 2 years.



**The Cut Off GPS Collar**



**The shot and abandoned  
buck white-tailed deer**

### DEER KILLED FOR AN ELK AND LEFT TO ROT

On October 18, 2008, a Stop Poaching call was received about a dead bull elk that had been shot and left in elk area 19 south of Casper. The Stop Poaching report included a description of a vehicle that was in the area when the bull was found. Game wardens Aaron Kerr and Daniel Beach responded to the location of the elk to work the crime scene, including evidence collection. In the meantime, a pickup truck fitting the description stopped at the CWD sampling station and Regional Wildlife Supervisor Scott Edberg contacted the driver. Edberg took photographs of the suspect vehicle to show to the witnesses and questioned the driver - a Casper man who was released after admitting to hunting deer, but denying all knowledge of the elk being shot.

Wardens Kerr and Beach obtained evidence from the crime scene, including a distinctive set of footprints leading to and from the location the witnesses had seen the suspect vehicle parked. When shown the photos of the suspect vehicle later that evening, witnesses confirmed it as the vehicle they had seen. The following day, Wardens Kerr and Beach interviewed the suspect again, who confessed to shooting the elk after being confronted with the physical evidence. The man said he had been hunting in the early morning just after daylight, and believed he was shooting a large mule deer buck instead of a small bull elk. Not knowing what to do, he had planned on caring for the elk, but left when he saw the other hunters there.



**The dead 5x5 bull elk as it was found by game wardens Kerr and Beach**

The suspect in this case was charged with taking an elk during a closed season and waste of a big game animal. He was fined a total of \$2,190 and had his hunting privileges suspended for three years. The wardens who investigated this case wish to credit the two deer hunters who called the Stop Poaching Hotline. Without the detailed information they provided, it is likely this crime would have gone unsolved.

### **CAN'T OUTFRAN THE LONG ARM OF THE GAME WARDEN**

On October 3, 2005, a party of five hunters from southwest Missouri was deer hunting on the Boner Ranch northeast of Lusk, Wyoming. A local outfitter observed the party shoot a mule deer buck on his side of a bordering private property fence and flee after cutting off the head and cape of the harvested mule deer. He immediately contacted the local game warden.

The next day Lusk game warden Gary Boyd contacted the hunters about the illegal deer, but they would not admit to having anything to do with the harvested buck. Warden Boyd told the suspects to stay until the matter was cleared up, but when warden Boyd left to get the outfitter to identify the hunters, they packed their equipment and fled back to Missouri.

Later that week, warden Boyd contacted Missouri Conservation agents about the incident, who contacted the suspects at their homes. They conducted interviews and collected DNA samples/evidence from the suspects' harvested mule deer to compare with the mule deer carcass left in Wyoming. DNA lab results confirmed that the suspects' freshly harvested mule deer did not match with the carcass left in Wyoming and the case became cold.

In August 2006, the new Lusk game warden, Andy Countryman reopened the case. Warden Countryman, a southwest Missouri native, discovered the hunting party was involved in the harvesting and waste of the mule deer buck due to his connections in Missouri.

During the winter of 2006-2007, the investigation revealed three of the five hunters were involved in a mule deer buck hi-grading operation. An interview led to the admission that the group was involved in the taking of the first reported mule deer buck. Interviews with unaffiliated hunters led to the discovery of another headless buck found. In March of 2007, the remains of the second headless buck were discovered in the field and sent to the lab for DNA comparison. The results came back positive to one of the mule deer buck heads taken back to Missouri in October 2005 and sampled by Missouri Conservations agents. A third wasted mule deer buck was also discovered during the investigation.

Due to the Lacey Act Violation, warden Andy Countryman contacted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in an effort to continue the investigation in Missouri. In May 2007, Missouri Conservation agents from four counties assisted warden Countryman with the interviews of the suspects. The information obtained from the interviews was crucial in this investigation. During the follow up investigation in Wyoming, warden Countryman discovered the first reported mule deer buck head still hanging in a tree about a mile from where it was harvested. The all terrain vehicle tracks where still there and led him directly to the buck. After lab results and written statements were finalized, the group was charged in the spring of 2008.

In October 2008, all three suspects entered a plea agreement with Niobrara County Circuit Court. Ron Mathes Sr. pled guilty to intent of illegally taking antlered big game and wanton destruction of big game.



**Poached buck mule deer hidden in a tree – found almost 2 years later**

He paid \$5,030 in fines, \$8,000 in restitution and lost hunting/fishing privileges for five years; this will be entered into the Wildlife Violator Compact. Ron Mathes Jr. pled guilty to intent of illegally taking antlered big game. He paid \$5,030 in fines, \$4,000 in restitution and lost hunting/fishing privileges for five years; this will also be entered in the Wildlife Violator Compact. William Hudson pled guilty to accessory to wanton destruction of a big game animal. He paid \$3,030 in fines and lost his hunting/fishing privileges for two years, which will be entered into the Wildlife Violator Compact. Additionally, all three suspects shall not hunt, fish, attempt or be allowed to obtain a wildlife license of any kind in the State of Wyoming during their lifetime.

## **EVIDENCE DOESN'T LIE**

A Stop Poaching tip led to the arrest and conviction of a Casper man for taking elk during a closed season in an area chronically plagued by poaching.

According to a tip received by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, an individual was seen loading a large bull elk into the back of a pickup truck in elk hunt area 113 on the Thunder Basin National Grassland on Nov. 30, 2008. There was no bull elk season open in area 113 at the time of the incident. However, elk season was open in area 129 several miles to the east.

The informant provided a license plate number from the pickup truck and this led game wardens to Adam Hausman, 34, of Casper. Upon questioning, Hausman stated that he had a general elk license for area 129 and had gone hunting there on Nov. 30th. He claimed to have killed a bull elk early that morning in area 129. Wardens later discovered that Hausman was in possession of two large bull elk. He said his friend, Richard Chappell, 38, of Casper, killed the second elk.

Game Wardens Aaron Kerr and John Lund asked Hausman to point to the location on a map where he killed his elk. When he had difficulty doing so, the wardens requested he lead them to the kill site to show them the gut piles. On December 13th, Hausman led wardens to locations in area 129, where he had moved the gut piles the week before to disguise the location of the kills. Unknown to Hausman, wardens had already investigated the location given by the informant in area 113 and discovered two gut piles. They took DNA samples and sent them to the Wyoming Game and Fish Wildlife Forensics Laboratory in Laramie. The lab matched these samples to DNA samples taken from blood and elk hair in Hausman's truck and the heads of the two bulls. Hausman later confessed to killing both elk in area 113.

Hausman was charged with one count of taking an elk during a closed season, one count of taking an elk without a license, and interference with a peace officer. He was ordered to pay \$2,440 in fines and \$12,000 in restitution. He also lost his hunting privileges for six years and was given a 90-day suspended jail sentence with one year of unsupervised probation. Chappell was charged with transfer of license, fined \$780 and lost his hunting privileges for two years.

In this case, we were fortunate to have a witness call in with information critical to the investigation. Without it, this crime would have likely remained unsolved.”



**Game wardens Kerr and Lund with the illegal trophy bulls**

### **HERE KITTY KITTY**

In November a Michigan man was charged and convicted with intent to illegally take trophy game in Crook County. Paul Protasiewicz of Linwood MI. shot and killed a female mountain lion without a license while deer hunting near Sundance. Protasiewicz then tried to cover the crime by purchasing a non-resident mountain lion license later the same day. During an interview with game warden Daniel Beach, Protasiewicz eventually admitted to poaching the lion after telling a series of untruths. Protasiewicz was given a 14-day suspended jail sentence and paid more than \$10,000 in fines and restitution for his illegal acts. Protasiewicz also lost his hunting privileges for 5 years in Wyoming and 29 other states.



**Game warden Beach with the illegal lion and the poacher's rifle**

### **THE PERSON HUNTING NEAR YOU COULD BE THE GAME WARDEN**

On October 17, 2008, Game Warden Shawn Blajszczak, based on a tip from a concerned citizen, caught up with 4 male individuals involved in an over limit of elk, transfer of license, and violation of walk-in area rules in elk area 7 south of Douglas. One of the individuals took an over limit of elk by shooting 2 bulls in a walk-in area. The 4 individuals then decided to tag the extra elk by using another person's license – an illegal transfer of an elk license. To add to the illegal activity, they went in and retrieved the illegal elk in the middle of the night using an ATV – against walk-in area rules. The individuals involved in the cases all pled guilty and paid \$1,970 in fines. The suspects were from Gillette, WY, Douglas, WY, Lyman, NE, and Gering, NE.

### **CAN'T COVER UP YOUR POACHINGS USING A HIGH SCHOOL CLASS**

Wildlife officers in northeast Wyoming were finally able to close a large poaching case on a Weston County resident. Michael Hagerman from Upton was charged with six counts of the taking antlered big game animals without a license (23-3-102(d)) and two counts of taking turkeys without a license. Through a plea agreement, Hagerman pled guilty to five counts of taking antlered big game animals and was fined \$25,150 in fines and restitution and lost his hunting and fishing privileges for the next 15 years. This case all started from a call received by Newcastle game warden Dustin Shorma in March of 2008. Due to the complexity and size of the case, several wildlife investigators were called in to begin the long process of gathering additional evidence and formulating a plan. In June of 2008, warden Shorma and several

wildlife investigators arrested Mr. Hagerman and conducted interviews and searched several residences, including his workplace (with the Weston County School District). It was discovered that Mr. Hagerman had been killing buck deer and antelope without licenses or was using licenses from family members to cover them. The illegal animals were then taken to the Upton High School, where they were processed and consumed by the Outdoor Recreation Class. Several sets of antlers were recovered from the high school, as well as from his parent's residence.



**A few of the illegal deer killed by Hagerman during his poaching spree**

### **ONE BUCK, ONE DOE = VIOLATIONS**

On October 1, 2008, Newcastle game warden Dustin Shorma received a Stop Poaching call regarding two antelope that had been shot and left near Osage. Shorma responded to the scene and discovered a freshly killed buck and doe antelope lying in the sagebrush off an oil field two-track. Both animals had been shot with a high-powered rifle.

After carefully examining evidence left at the scene, Shorma was able to locate a suspect vehicle and interviewed the driver. The driver, an Indiana resident, admitted to shooting both antelope. He said he got scared when he saw that one of the antelope was a buck when his license was only valid for does or fawns.

The shooter was fined \$1,810 for taking an antelope without a license, two counts of waste, and one count of failing to tag a big game animal.