



Date: 10-11-2024

Incident: Deer Poaching Investigation Update

Authority: Sheriff Ryan F. Waldschmidt

Over the last two months, investigators from the Fond du Lac County Sheriff's Office and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources conducted hundreds of combined hours of investigation into the alleged killing and mistreatment of whitetail deer and other wildlife in southeastern Fond du Lac, northern Washington, and northeastern Dodge Counties. The investigation identified a significant number and variety of criminal and non-criminal violations and this media release is intended to provide a summary of our findings.

Investigators have reason to believe that well over 100 deer were shot and/or killed between late spring of 2023 and July of 2024. One adult female and three juvenile males were identified as the primary suspects of this investigation. These alleged crimes occurred in the 200 square mile region between Campbellsport, Waucousta, Lomira, Theresa, West Bend, and Kewaskum. Much of this activity occurred after dark and would continue well into the early morning hours of the following day. Suspects drove around with a spotlight shining the fields, and when a deer was identified, suspects would fire a rifle from the vehicle at the deer. If they believed a deer was shot, suspects would enter the field to identify the sex of the deer. Most of the deer they found dead would be left to rot where they lay. However, the heads of some bucks were removed by these suspects, particularly when the buck had large antlers. Other deer were wounded by gunshots but not killed. Many of these nighttime excursions involved shooting multiple deer in the outing.

Investigators determined these suspects would also drive around with the intent of striking deer in the roadway with their vehicle. In one incident, the deer survived being struck by their vehicle but was severely wounded from the impact. The juvenile suspects picked the deer up and placed it in the trunk of their vehicle while recording video and taking "selfies" of and with the deer. They drove around to various locations with the deer still alive and suffering in the trunk or back seat and continued to produce video clips documenting their travels with the wounded deer. One of the videos showed the suspects holding the deer, still alive but clearly suffering, while walking around the inside of their home. The deer eventually died while in their captivity hours after being struck with the vehicle. In another incident, this spring they found a newly born fawn alongside the road and captured it. The fawn was also placed in a vehicle and driven around, taken inside their residence, and was later released back into the wild. In addition to capturing and/or killing deer, investigators obtained evidence to believe these suspects also targeted and harassed other wildlife including geese, raccoons, possums, and turtles. These animals would oftentimes be captured, held in captivity and harassed prior to release.

Suspects involved in these crimes include three 16-year-old Campbellsport males and one 36-year-old Campbellsport female.

The following is a list of alleged criminal and civil DNR violations involved in this investigation. This list is not all-inclusive:

- Mistreating animals resulting in death
- Possession of a dangerous weapon
- Hunting deer with artificial light
- Hunting during the closed season
- Possession of a firearm while shining
- Possession of deer during the closed season
- Loading or discharging a firearm in or from a motorized vehicle
- Discharging a firearm from or across a highway or within 50 feet of the center of a roadway
- Hunting within 50 feet of a road's center
- Transporting a loaded firearm in or on a moving vehicle
- Possession of game killed by unlawful or unknown means
- Hunting with weapon/ammunition of inherent design, or used in a manner, not reasonably capable of reducing target to possession (i.e. shooting an animal without the expectation of successfully harvesting the animal)
- Unauthorized taking of live wild animals from the wild
- Depositing or discharging solid waste on public or private property
- Obstructing a Conservation Warden

Both the Fond du Lac County Sheriff's Office and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources have referred numerous charges to the Fond du Lac County District Attorney's Office, Washington County District Attorney's Office, and Fond du Lac County Juvenile Intake.

After the initial media release in July, I was asked by a media outlet to describe what I felt about the accusations. My gut response was: "Senseless. Reckless. Indiscriminate." Since that time, and after reading reports and observing video and photographic evidence obtained during this investigation, those words remain my best summation of the situation. Wildlife and hunting are a deep part of Wisconsin's heritage and history, and the horrific acts committed against these animals will shock the conscience of hunters and non-hunters alike. We're thankful for the observant citizen who took the time to report their observation of suspicious circumstances to our sheriff's office. Their call initiated this significant investigation. We also want to thank the public who came forward with information that led to a more comprehensive investigation after our initial media release.

I also want to personally thank the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for their diligent and collaborative efforts throughout this investigation. Their expertise was invaluable in determining the facts and identifying violations of law. Working together jointly on this investigation, our goal was to document and present the facts of this case that will lead to accountability for the senseless, reckless, and indiscriminate assault on Wisconsin wildlife – wildlife we all, as residents, share in the responsibility of managing and protecting.

With hunting season upon us, citizens are reminded they can call or text to report suspected DNR violations to the DNR Violation Hotline at 1-800-847-9367. If the violation potentially endangers other humans or property, 911 should be called.

Sheriff Ryan F. Waldschmidt

ORIGINAL MEDIA RELEASE

Date: 07-31-2024

Incident: Open Investigation – Deer Poaching

Authority: Sheriff Ryan F. Waldschmidt

In mid-July, a tip led a Fond du Lac County sheriff's deputy to uncover what is believed to be a large scale deer poaching scheme. Due to the nature of the offenses involved, the deputy contacted a conservation warden with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and a joint investigation was initiated.

The range involved covers approximately 200 square miles over Fond du Lac, Dodge, and Washington Counties, and we have information to believe this has been occurring over the course of the last 12 months. General boundaries of the area targeted by suspects fall within a perimeter outlined between Campbellsport, Waucousta, Lomira, Theresa, West Bend, and Kewaskum.

At this time, we are asking anyone with information that may be related to this investigation contact law enforcement. Information may include:

- Hearing gunshots during overnight hours.
- Observing a suspicious vehicle shining deer, stopping in the roadway, and/or shooting from a vehicle.
- Locating dead deer carcasses, on public or private land, with bullet wounds. Bucks would have the full head removed and does would be fully intact.
- Observing deer, alive or deceased, with what appear to be gunshot wounds, especially outside of deer hunting season.
- Any other information that may be relevant to an investigation of this nature.

You can provide information by contacting Conservation Warden Zachery Feest (Washington County) at 262-237-0904 or Conservation Warden William Hanke (Fond du Lac County) at 920-904-2653. You can also leave an anonymous tip on the Fond du Lac County Law Enforcement Tip Line by calling 920-906-4777.

This investigation remains open and ongoing. Further details about this case and any potential charges will be shared at the conclusion of the investigation.

Sheriff Ryan F. Waldschmidt

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