

Deer Poaching Ends in High Speed Chase and Crash

The Green River Valley in western Wyoming is home to one of the largest mule deer winter ranges and some of the highest quality bucks in the West. These deer are very vulnerable during the months of November and early December when they are rutting. Over the past decades, these large deer and their high visibility set the conditions for opportunistic and intentional illegal take. Through the 1990s and early 2000s many large buck mule deer were illegally killed on these winter ranges prompting the Department to initiate special winter range task forces. These task forces were intended to put more game wardens on the ground when deer are the most vulnerable and likely to become victims of illegal activity.



During the fall of 2008, now retired Lovell Game Warden John Hyde was patrolling the deer winter range south of Pinedale in the Big Sandy country. While on his early morning patrol he came upon a concerned citizen who drove the road for work most mornings. The man told Warden Hyde he had been watching a large deer for several days and had found the buck dead near the road where he had often seen the deer. The local worker also provided Warden Hyde with a description of a black truck with a partial license plate that he had seen in the area early in the morning with what he believed was three people inside.

Warden Hyde quickly conducted an investigation and determined the buck had been shot from the road and left. It was a large non-typical buck with heavy antlers and was impressive even for a

Pinedale deer. Warden Hyde, being the seasoned veteran he was, knew most poachers would not leave a set of antlers that large and suspected they would return at some point to retrieve it. He left the deer in place and retreated to a location where he could watch both the road and the deer. He remained on his perch until just before dark, when he noticed a vehicle matching the description provided stop on the road next to where the deer was lying. He observed one man exit the vehicle and walk towards the deer and the vehicle left the area.

Warden Hyde notified South Pinedale Game Warden Brian Nesvik of the situation and Nesvik headed towards Hyde's location. Warden Hyde drove to the location of the deer, met the suspect vehicle head on and stopped them on the road. He directed the driver to pull over as he repositioned his vehicle to a safer location. The driver pulled to the side of the road but then fled the area. Warden Hyde pursued the black pick-up truck, which had a trailer in tow, at high speeds on gravel roads. Warden Nesvik arrived and joined the pursuit.

The suspects, who had left their friend behind in the dark, traveled at such a high speed the trailer they were towing came unhitched and came to rest in the middle of the road. The suspects continued until they were unable to negotiate a sharp curve and rolled their truck several times through a barbed wire fence. The wardens quickly secured the two suspects and determined they were not seriously injured.

Warden Nesvik obtained a phone number from the driver for the owner of the truck, the suspect still on foot. He used the phone number to text the suspect still on foot and advised him that his truck had been wrecked and instructed him to walk to the county road where a warden would meet him. The third suspect, without many other options, complied and Warden Hyde picked him up. Interviews on the scene identified the two primary suspects and the wardens took both men into custody. Both were booked into the county jail and charged with multiple crimes including Wyoming's "winter range statute."

Wardens completed a thorough crime scene investigation and were able to determine the suspect who exited the vehicle had begun to cut the head off the deer before being scared away by the approaching wardens. Wardens were also able to locate a bloody knife he hid while walking to the road to meet with officers. The third subject was determined to have little involvement and was just along for the ride.

Interviews and investigation revealed the suspects had killed the deer early in the morning and left it so they could return in the low light hours of early evening to retrieve the deer head and then travel home to Utah. Both subjects were convicted and paid thousands of dollars in fines, lost their hunting and fishing privileges, were placed on probation, sentenced to community service and paid thousands in restitution.

