

Hammers Connect Poaching Incidents

Two rubber mallets recently connected two poaching scenes to one Wheatland resident. While patrolling Elk Area 7 on Friday, January 18, 2013, game warden Kelly Todd stopped to investigate a gut pile on the side of the Garrett Road within Noel Hall Company Ranch Lands. Tracks and other evidence indicated an elk had been harvested at this location.

The suspect had driven a short distance off the road, attached the elk to a pickup, dragged it onto the road to eviscerate it, and eventually loaded it into the back of a pickup. Warden Todd knew very few people had permission to hunt that portion of the Hall Ranch and he suspected a trespassing violation. Todd found a rubber mallet that had been dropped in the snow near the location where the elk had fallen, but he found very little other evidence, despite an extensive search of the area.

Knowing Laramie regional access coordinator/game warden Jason Sherwood was also patrolling the nearby Pinto Creek Hunter Management Area, Todd contacted him and related the location of the suspected poaching and asked that he take special note of anyone who may be missing a rubber hammer.



Rubber mallet found by warden Todd on January 18th.



Elk viscera and tracks found on the Garrett Road on January 18th.

A short time later, a family emergency called warden Todd out of the field.

On the evening of Saturday, January 19th, Wheatland game warden Troy Tobiasson received a call from a local hunter who had spent part of the day hunting on state lands adjacent to the Garrett Road in Albany County. The hunter had come across two other men on the property who appeared to have shot a “spike” bull, despite the season being open only for antlerless elk, and who had then driven a considerable distance off the county road to load and retrieve the elk. Having only a rough knowledge of the described location, Tobiasson left warden Sherwood a phone message asking if he could help in locating the reported crime scene and any bull elk parts or other

evidence left there. The hunter did not record the men’s license plate or names, but gave detailed descriptions of them and their distinctive pickup - a faded, light blue, older model GM with a homemade bumper and utility-style bed.

As Sherwood attempted to locate the kill site the following morning, the hunter who had initially reported the incident came by and gave him more detailed information on where the events had taken place the previous day, and gave a description of where the young bull had been loaded. He also mentioned another blood trail where a wounded elk had fled the area. Sherwood hiked into the kill site and noted a rubber mallet lying in the snow near the viscera from the bull elk. He remembered the description warden Todd had passed along to him two days earlier and realized that kill site was less than three miles away. After collecting the hammer and DNA samples from the kill site and photographing foot and vehicle tracks found nearby, Sherwood then back-tracked the two suspects. Sherwood discovered a blood trail where another elk had been wounded near the bull, and a winding cross-country route where one of the suspects had driven the pickup more than a third of a mile off the road to the kill site. Notably, the pickup was driven up a steep, rocky hill, climbing more than 70 vertical feet in the first 300 feet traveled after it left the road.



Rubber mallet found at second kill site by warden Sherwood on January 20th.

When Sherwood returned to his vehicle, he could hear warden Tobiasson excitedly trying to reach him on the radio, later explaining that the suspect vehicle had passed by him while he was preparing to check ice fishermen that morning. He had identified the suspects as Marcel “Roy” Knott and his son.



Elk parts found at the Knott’s residence.

Roy had admitted to shooting the spike, stating they “thought it would count as a calf” and had also shown Tobiasson a cow elk he had killed on the 17th, stating it had been killed in Area 5.

After comparing notes, both wardens agreed they needed to visit with the Knotts to clear up discrepancies between their stories and the crime scenes near the Garrett Road. Tobiasson contacted the Knotts to set appointments for their interviews, and Sherwood went to the kill site warden Todd found on the 18th. Sherwood found fading tire tracks consistent with the ones at the more recent crime scene. The wardens researched the suspects’ license purchases and found the son did not have any licenses for Area 7 and Roy had one Area 7 Type 6 license (used to tag the spike bull), an Area 5 Type 6 license (used to tag the cow), and an unfilled “General” elk license.

On Tuesday, January 22nd, Tobiasson and Sherwood interviewed both Knotts in Wheatland. Roy confirmed he shot the spike, not realizing it was a bull until it was too late. As he walked back to the road to retrieve the pickup, he noticed a cow elk behind him and attempted to shoot it as well, mistakenly assuming his "General" license was valid for Area 7's late, antlerless elk season similar to the seasons for Area 5. When confronted with specific questions about the cow he had killed the previous Thursday, he admitted he had shot it in Area 7. He stated after he had harvested the elk, he realized he was "off the Walk-In Area" so he chose to tag it with his Area 5 license, hoping the remote location would give him an alibi to help hide the trespassing violation.

Roy was issued "must appear" citations for operating a motor vehicle off-road on state lands, hunting in the wrong area, and hunting private land without permission. He was also issued a written warning for taking the wrong sex of animal. On February 5th, Albany County Judge Robert A. Castor accepted Roy Knott's guilty pleas and sentenced him to fines totaling \$1,470 and suspended his hunting, fishing, and trapping privileges for two years.

