

TOP STORY

## Reward offered for elk poached near Ellensburg

By TONY BUHR staff writer  
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At least five elk were killed and the carcasses left to rot when a person or group of people reportedly shot into a herd north of Ellensburg on Nov. 6.

State wildlife officials are looking for leads in relation to the illegal shooting and several organizations have put out rewards for information. The incident took place in between Schnebly and Coleman canyons near Ellensburg.

Four calves and a cow were killed when a person or a group of people shot into a herd, said Chase Gunnell, deputy communications director for the Conservation Northwest. Conservation Northwest has a standing reward of \$3,000 for information that leads of the arrest of anyone involved in a spree killing of elk or deer. The Safari Club International has offered a \$1,000 award for this incident.

"This is the worst elk poaching incident in recent years," Gunnell said. "It was particularly egregious."

Fish and Wildlife does not believe all of the elk that were shot were found, Gunnell said. Some may have been injured and then walked off to die.

The day of the incident, other hunters heard radio chatter about the shooting and found the dead animals a few hours later, he said. Some illegal poaching does occur from people seeking meat, but the poachers in this case did not attempt to harvest

the elk.

"I can think of no sane reason why somebody would shoot into a herd like that and leave them to rot on a hillside," Gunnell said.

It's illegal to hunt calves. Cows can be hunted with a special permit, according to Sgt. Mike Jewell with the WDFW.

## **Investigation**

Morgan Grant, police sergeant for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, said the department is looking for leads in the case and asking the public for any information, Grant said. WDFW does not have any suspects at this time and it is an ongoing investigation, he said. The department also is offering a reward.

Kittitas County does have poaching, Grant said, but so does all of Washington. What makes Kittitas County unique is the diversity of its ecosystems and the animals in them.

"We have everything from rattlesnakes to mountain goats," he said.

Most outdoorsmen are good and honest people, Grant said. In his 34 years as an officer with Fish and Wildlife, most of Grant's cases have been solved by someone providing a tip.

"We're fortunate to have those kinds of partnerships," he said.

Fish and Wildlife has a program called Eyes in the Woods that trains local sportsmen to identify suspicious activity and report it, Grant said. When Fish and Wildlife gets a tip it takes it to the Washington State Patrol and then a case is built. It is then prosecuted in local jurisdictions.

Poaching is an ongoing problem for Washington state, and there have been cases of poaching criminal rings, Grant said. A few years ago people hunted bears for their gall bladders, which were then sold to China as an aphrodisiac.

"Anytime you can connect a monetary value to something it's going to create a demand and people are going to push the limits," he said.

### **Focus on hunter education**

Bill Essman, vice president of the Kittitas County Field and Stream Club, said there is no excuse for poaching.

"That's why we teach hunter education," Essman said.

Incidents like the one on Nov. 6 do happen, but are not common, he said, and he's seen ones a lot worse. He isn't surprised that something like this would happen after the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife issued 510 tags this year. People get a tag and think they have to fill it, he said.

"That's not what hunting is about," Essman said. "It's not about you have to kill something."

Hunters are trained to shoot only when they have a clear shot, and not to shoot into a group. If they think they missed, they should check for blood and finish off the animal so it doesn't suffer, he said.

The best solution to the problem is hunter education and ethics, he said. It's the only solution that will stop it.

President of the Field and Stream Club Deborah Essman said the act on Nov. 6 was despicable. The person or people involved are not hunters and give true sportsmen a bad name.

"I can't think what the thought process was," Deborah Essman said. "These are the kind of incidents that put the hunting heritage at risk."

### Report information

To report information about this incident, call WDFW's Poaching Hotline, 877-933-9847, file a report through the agency's website, or text tips to WDFWTIP Report and send them to 847411.

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