

Lawmakers and Advocacy Groups Condemn Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife for Killing of Young Black Bear

ASHLAND, OREGON, USA, April 11, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A young Oregon black bear was killed by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) officials on April 8, 2021, and a Jackson County volunteer fire chief responding to a call from a concerned citizen has been cited with a misdemeanor by the Oregon State Police for his role in rescuing the animal from a busy public highway.

The killing of the animal and the issuance of the citation occurred even after pleas from concerned community members and a California wildlife sanctuary that offered medical care, transport, and a lifetime home for the young bear.

Despite public statements by ODFW that the bear was "emaciated," photos and witness accounts depict the animal as small, but otherwise healthy.

The day before ODFW killed the young bear, a local volunteer fire chief received a call from a concerned citizen that a young black bear was wandering in the road on Highway 66. The chief deployed to investigate and was able to locate the animal, which he estimated weighed about 40 pounds. He immediately contacted 911 by radio and requested help from the Oregon State Police (OSP) and ODFW. Repeated attempts were made to move the bear back into the woods, however, the bear continued to return to the road and was clearly in distress and in need of assistance. Over an hour passed with no sign of OSP and ODFW, so the chief removed the bear from the highway, transported it to his property, cared for the animal, continuing to reach out to others for guidance in what to do with the animal.

Later that afternoon, the fire chief was contacted by OSP over the telephone. The OSP officer was informed that the bear had been rescued from the highway, and the officer stated that the bear should be released somewhere "far away".

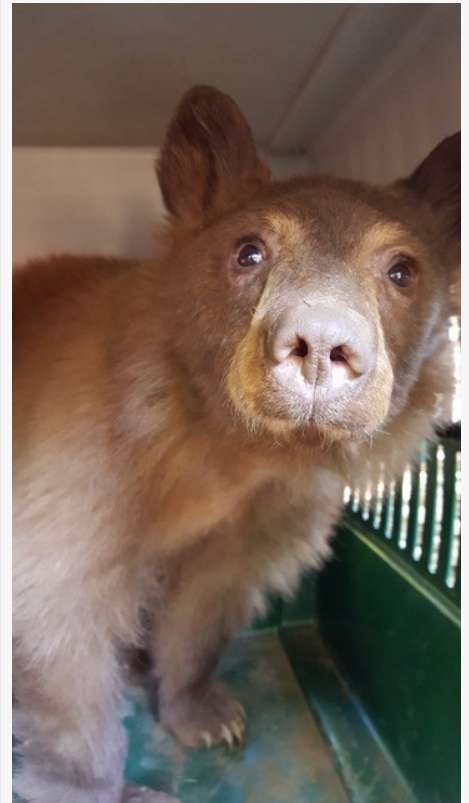


Photo: Tamara Drake

Neither OSP nor ODFW showed up for 24 hours after the chief contacted them. During that time, local residents located an accredited bear sanctuary in California that offered to travel to Oregon and transport it to their facility.

On April 8, the day after the chief rescued the bear from the roadway, ODFW and OSP officers arrived at his residence, seized the bear, and issued him a citation for criminal negligence and possession of wildlife without a permit. Despite being informed that

licensed accommodations had been located for the bear, ODFW killed the bear cub. It is unclear what method of killing was used.

animal wellness action

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In an email message to ODFW director Curt Melcher, Rep. Pam Marsh (D-Ashland), who represents the House district where the incident occurred, said:

“I am outraged by reports of OSP and ODFW mishandling of a lost bear cub on Highway 66 in my district. I know all of the individuals involved, my son saw the bear (which was not emaciated) and I understand the sequence of events. It is further clear that ODFW is misrepresenting this situation in the press in order to deflect legitimate criticism.

“Multiple people called ODFW for help with this cub, which repeatedly was sighted on the middle of the country highway. No one showed up. When the fire chief attempted to resolve the safety issues, OSP criminally cited him for violating wildlife permit laws that did not apply to his situation. Then ODFW killed the cub.

“This has caused tremendous angst in the mountain community. I believe both OSP and ODFW owe the fire chief and the neighborhood an apology.”

Lauren Regan, who is representing the fire chief pro bono and serves as Director and Senior Attorney at the Civil Liberties Defense Center, stated: “The fact that an Oregon State Trooper would criminally cite a Fire Chief in this instance is contrary to the law and public policy. The code the Chief was cited for violating pertains to people who are intending to keep a wild animal

as a pet or to exploit it for profit—that was clearly not the case here. The Wildlife laws specifically exempt a person who takes a wild animal in an emergency situation, as was the situation here. The law states the person may keep the animal for not more than 48 hours, during which time the person must make a good faith effort to contact law enforcement or a wildlife rehab center. In this case, the Chief completely complied with the law. He immediately notified law enforcement and a rehab center that was en route and did not keep the animal for more than 48 hours. It seems like this officer was ignorant of the law, and vindictive toward a fellow public servant attempting to keep his community safe from accidents involving wildlife and roadways. The Jackson County District Attorney should refuse to file this charge and the officer involved should apologize and receive remedial training on the law.”



“What we are seeing is a disturbing pattern by these two agencies of killing animals in need and punishing people who are kind enough to try and help them,” said Scott Beckstead, director of campaigns for [Animal Wellness Action](#) and the [Center for a Humane Economy](#). “These agencies are charged with serving the people and wildlife of Oregon, and yet again we see them abdicating that responsibility and instead responding with deliberate cruelty toward the animals and official persecution of good samaritans.”

“The despicable killing of this bear cub is business as usual for this killing agency,” said Brooks Fahy, executive director of the wildlife advocacy group, Predator defense. “This tragic case highlights an agency that has absolutely no empathy toward the very animals it is charged ‘managing.’ I have spent most of my adult life working with wildlife in Oregon and can tell you this is not an isolated incident. This happens all the time.”

The incident comes less than two years after both agencies came under withering criticism for the death of a young bobcat that wandered into a Eugene-area school. ODFW officials directed OSP officers to kill the animal, rather than take it to one of several qualified licensed wildlife rehabilitation centers in the state, including one just a few miles from the school. Rather than euthanizing the animal with an approved method of euthanasia, OSP officers killed the animal by bludgeoning it to death. The story sparked global outrage and calls for reform in how the agencies respond to wildlife in need, and culminated in a hearing before the Oregon legislature about the agencies and their handling of wildlife in distress.

“Like the agency’s brutal killing of the young bobcat in 2019, this case illustrates why changes to the rules governing ODFW’s handling of wildlife are badly overdue,” said Rep. Brad Witt (D-

Clatskanie), chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources and chair of the Oregon Sportsmen's Caucus. "There was no reason this little bear should have been killed by ODFW when safe and humane alternatives were available. The tragedy is compounded by the decision by Oregon State Police to cite this volunteer fireman with a crime for trying to do the right thing and help the animal. I will continue to support efforts to change these agencies' approach from one of destroying animals in need to actually helping them, as they should."

"We must stop assuming that the right resolution to interactions between humans and wildlife is to kill the wildlife," said Rep. Marty Wilde (D-Eugene). "ODFW needs to do better. The citation to the chief should be dismissed."

The availability of an accredited sanctuary that was willing to take the animal adds to the questions around the agencies' actions and decisions. "As soon as I got word of a young bear in Oregon who needed a home, we started facilitating the steps to begin his rescue," states Bobbi Brink, founder, and director of Lions Tigers & Bears. "After reaching out to ODFW and being ignored, and then finding out that once they finally did get the bear in their custody, they immediately put him down rather than considering any other options, is all very alarming."

Mr. Beckstead, a former mayor of Waldport, Oregon, and who now lives in rural Douglas County, said Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy have issued a request for public records from both agencies so the behavior and decisions of the officials can be carefully examined. "Not only did state wildlife personnel kill another defenseless young animal who would now be living in a sanctuary but for this heartless action, but they punished a public servant, acting in a volunteer capacity, to resolve an emergency. It's an outrage, and the people of Oregon deserve answers and accountability."

"Oregonians value wildlife, and they would rather see a bear cub in need rescued, not killed, by the agencies charged with protecting wildlife," said Shauna Sherick, CVT, founder of Wildwood Sanctuary and Preserve an Oregon nonprofit organization. "If ODFW and OSP punish the simple, practical act of providing care and transferring an animal to a sanctuary, wildlife rescue in Oregon will be impossible, and we know Oregonians won't stand for that."

"As a former Fire District Commissioner, and now wildlife advocate, I am in constant awe of the strength, emotional intelligence, and integrity displayed by firefighters like this Fire Chief," said Samantha Bruegger, Wildlife Coexistence Campaigner for WildEarth Guardians. "If ODFW had an ounce of the ethical integrity of this heroic first responder, the black bear cub would still be alive."

Animal Wellness Action (Action) is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) organization with a mission of helping animals by promoting legal standards forbidding cruelty. We champion causes that alleviate the suffering of companion animals, farm animals, and wildlife. We advocate for policies to stop dogfighting and cockfighting and other forms of malicious cruelty and to confront factory farming and other systemic forms of animal exploitation. To prevent cruelty, we promote

enacting good public policies, and we work to enforce those policies. To enact good laws, we must elect good lawmakers, and that's why we remind voters which candidates care about our issues and which ones don't. We believe helping animals helps us all.

The Animal Wellness Foundation (Foundation) is a Los Angeles-based private charitable organization with a mission of helping animals by making veterinary care available to everyone with a pet, regardless of economic ability. We organize rescue efforts and medical services for dogs and cats in need and help homeless pets find a loving caregiver. We are advocates for getting veterinarians to the front lines of the animal welfare movement; promoting responsible pet ownership; and vaccinating animals against infectious diseases such as distemper. We also support policies that prevent animal cruelty and that alleviate suffering. We believe helping animals helps us all.

The Center for a Humane Economy ("the Center") is a non-profit organization that focuses on influencing the conduct of corporations to forge a humane economic order. The first organization of its kind in the animal protection movement, the Center encourages businesses to honor their social responsibilities in a culture where consumers, investors, and other key stakeholders abhor cruelty and the degradation of the environment and embrace innovation as a means of eliminating both.

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