

TRACE EVIDENCE LINKS HUNTER TO GRIZZLY BEAR POACHING

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In October of 2011 a grizzly bear hide with head and paws attached was abandoned just outside the community of Stony Plain, Alberta. Grizzly bears are considered a threatened species in Alberta and poaching of a grizzly bear can lead to a significant fine and potential jail time. With no leads available, Alberta Fish & Wildlife Officers appealed to the public, via the media, for any information regarding the incident. Shortly afterwards a witness came forward with information that provided the first leads in the investigation. A search of the initial suspect's garage and vehicle identified two bear hairs caught in the box liner of the truck. These hairs produced a DNA typing profile matching the abandoned carcass. Further investigation by Fish & Wildlife Officers tracked down a second suspect. A search of the second suspect's residence resulted in no biological evidence linking her to the grizzly bear, but a digital photo of the suspect posing with a large, dead bear provided a possible kill site. Using the GPS information cached with the digital photo, a Fish & Wildlife Officer located the possible kill site and, with the aide of his family dog, recovered a single rib bone. This rib bone also produced a DNA typing profile that matched the abandoned hide and linked the second suspect to the poaching of the grizzly bear. The combination of DNA and electronic evidence resulted in conviction of three individuals and a total of \$30,500 in fines as well as 3-6 year hunting suspensions.

This presentation will discuss the Alberta Fish & Wildlife Forensic Services Section's procedure for DNA typing of grizzly bears and trace evidence. Significant in this case was the trace biological evidence, the convoluted trail to link suspects, the four month time delay between the incident and the recovery of the rib bone, and the poaching of a threatened species.

The evidence for this investigation was collected by organized teams of Fish & Wildlife Officers, including the Forensic Services Section, under the authority of multiple search warrants.