

Secure Channel Not So Secure...

In October 2009, Mountain View Game Warden Daniel Beach was positioned near the top of a mountain at dawn looking down on a herd of elk in a closed road area over 1,100 yards away. As he watched, a cow elk fell to the ground. The sound of a distant, high-powered rifle shot followed and Beach knew he had inadvertently witnessed a successful shot. However, as Beach watched the shooter field dress and prep the animal, he noticed the telltale acts consistent with tagging a carcass were absent.

The shooter then began to talk into a walkie-talkie radio. Beach immediately started scanning with his portable radio and caught this end of a conversation on channel 17, “Baby, if you see a game warden, you got to let me know!” As the shooter left the carcass behind and headed back toward the main road, Beach waited with radio and digital recorder in hand trying to intercept any information. A few minutes later a conversation between a man and a woman was heard and recorded over the radio. This conversation was all Beach needed to make a transfer of license case against the man and his wife. This exchange, according to the prosecuting attorney, proved intent: “If you see a game warden, you got to let me know!” followed by his wife saying, “I know, I know.”

Knowing from their conversation that it was going to take a while for the couple to return to the elk, Beach walked off the face of the mountain to the downed elk. At the scene, Beach confirmed there was no tag on the animal and headed back to intercept the pair. During the initial contact and interview, the couple was dishonest and swore that the female had shot the elk. At one point, they even got upset that Beach would question their hunting ethics. A few moments later, two full confessions were obtained and the female asked to be taken to jail. Beach then assisted the couple in packing the elk the rest of the way out.

The couple later admitted to Beach that they thought they had everything covered by shooting the elk in a remote section of the forest and using what they called a “secure channel” on their radios and they were sure they would get away with it. They had even outfitted the gun she was carrying with live and empty shell casings in the stock sleeve.

The shooter pled guilty to taking an elk without a license and was fined \$1,200. His wife pled guilty to transfer of license and was fined \$410. Both of them lost their hunting privileges for two years and had to forfeit the two walkie-talkies they used that day.

