

Moving Belly

On June 15, 2011, Cheyenne Game Warden Kyle Lash received a stop poaching report. A concerned citizen reported a badger and a doe antelope with a fetus had been shot by their home near Federal, WY. Cheyenne Game Warden Shawn Blajszczak and Game Warden Kyle Lash investigated the carcasses.



The dead antelope was located less than 300 yards away from the badger carcass near a county road. Initially, the antelope (with a fetus inside) appeared so mangled the wardens thought it was hit by a vehicle. No other evidence indicating tracks or empty rounds was found in the area on that day. On the afternoon of June 16, 2011, Lash received information from a confidential informant offering new information pertaining to an antelope that had been poached near Federal, WY. Statements were collected from the confidential informant, which verified accurate information found at the antelope dump site.

The confidential informant only knew one of the suspects involved in the poaching. However, the notion of Facebook conversations came to mind, hoping others might have posted on what they did that day. By following Facebook conversations, Game Warden Lash was able to identify other individuals involved with the poaching. All had commented on how exciting and “crazy” the day of June 14th was for them.

On June 23, 2011, the suspects, Dominick Apodaca, Kevin Wolfe, and David Erb, were interviewed. They stated that on June 14, 2011, around 8:00 A.M. they had met at Kevin Wolfe’s residence near Federal, WY. They decided to shoot guns for a while, and then go coyote hunting on public land near Federal. They claimed that around 10:00 A.M. on the state land near Federal, Wolfe had spotted an antelope running in front of them at about 150 yards. Apodaca climbed into the bed of the truck to rest his .270 caliber rifle over the cab of the truck. Apodaca took one shot at the antelope, hitting and wounding the antelope in the hind quarter. The three drove the truck off the main road out through a section of state land to chase down the injured antelope. Once close enough, Erb jumped out of the truck and unloaded his 9mm pistol into the head of the antelope. While Erb was shooting the antelope, Apodaca also fired rounds from his .22 caliber rifle into the antelope as well.

While standing around the antelope carcass, the three individuals noticed the belly of the antelope moving around. Wolfe then decided to shoot a .22 caliber rifle into the belly of the antelope to stop the antelope belly from moving around. As a result of shooting into the belly of the doe antelope, the three recognized the fetus inside the doe. Wolfe and Apodaca then decided to load the antelope carcass up into Wolfe’s truck and move it to a better place to use as coyote bait. The location they moved the carcass to was where Game Wardens Lash and Blajszczak first responded to the mangled antelope.

Dominick Apodaca pled guilty to wanton destruction of a big game animal and taking big game from a vehicle with fines and restitution totaling \$4,550. David Erb pled guilty to wanton destruction of a big game animal and taking big game with an illegal caliber with fines and restitution totaling \$2,080. Kevin Wolfe pled guilty to wanton destruction of a big game animal and accessory to hunting big game during a closed season totaling \$2,080 in court costs. The firearms used to commit the poaching were forfeited to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. In addition, all three: Apodaca, Wolfe, and Erb lost their hunting privileges for 3 years.

The confidential informant provided pertinent information leading to the successful prosecution of this case. Therefore, the confidential informant was nominated to receive a \$500 reward. Without his help, there is a good chance this case would have never come to light.