

TRAIL of

PART I **Passing the Buck:** Saskatchewan Conservation Officer Casey Howey

PART I

On Nov. 25, 2003, the Porcupine Plain office of Saskatchewan Environment received a complaint from the Weekes area regarding a whitetail buck that had been shot and left. The animal had been shot on posted land, dragged into a hay field where the antlers were removed and the carcass left to rot until it was unfit for human consumption. Bullet casings found near the scene were noted to be of an unusual calibre.

The next morning a report came in of another deer that had been found, under circumstances similar to the earlier kill. Later that afternoon another deer was reported shot and left on private land. Upon investigation it became apparent that officers were dealing with a group of poachers who were intent on collecting antlers and concerned about wasting the carcasses. All three kill sites were within 100 kilometres of each other and, given the similarity of the evidence recovered by investigators, they embarked on a hunt for a group of poachers.

Officers had been kept exceptionally busy during that particular week as a result of the illegal activities of another crew that was operating in the same area—shooting deer and caching them in the bush. In that case, an early morning patrol paid dividends when officers discovered a group of three hunters from Quebec picking up deer earlier in the week and tagging them with Saskatchewan tags and deer tags issued from Manitoba.

They were found in possession of eight whitetails and were later sentenced to pay fines of \$5,210 as well as a mandatory one-year hunting licence suspension.

Officers from the Greenwater field office maintained their efforts to find those responsible for the headless deer but as the week passed it appeared as though the case would go unsolved. However, on the afternoon of Nov. 28, there was a break in the case. Officers stopped a vehicle with hunters traveling towards Porcupine Plain. Upon inspection, they located rifle casings and other evidence that was consistent with the headless

deer case. The trio of suspects, also from Quebec, were detained and taken to the Porcupine Plain office for further questioning.

A subsequent search of the vehicle produced various hunting articles, including blood-stained clothing, blood stains in the carpet of the vehicle, various video cameras and tapes, and a shell box filled with exposed 35mm camera film. In addition, global positioning (GPS) devices and firearms that matched the empty shell casings were recovered.

Upon questioning, the three denied any involvement in any illegal hunting activities. All three were still in possession of their Saskatchewan white-tailed deer tags. Additional evidence was recovered relating to their hunting activities in Saskatchewan as well as activities that had occurred in the Province of Alberta. Officers forwarded photographic evidence and GPS information to Alberta authorities and subsequently made contact with the Fish and Wildlife district office in Provost.

Investigators developed the 35mm film the next day. A picture is worth a thousand words and those photographs spoke volumes. The group's activities in Alberta and Saskatchewan over the previous two-week period began to come to light. Photographic evidence showed seven sets of antlers, skull split and displayed on a hotel room floor. It seemed likely that the antlers had already been shipped away. With assistance from fellow officers in Lloydminster, investigators determined the location of the hotel room. Once again officers caught a break when the seven sets of antlers that had been boxed up for shipment to Quebec had been returned to the hotel by the courier because blood was leaking from the container. That evidence was subsequently seized by Lloydminster conservation officers.

Slowly but surely Saskatchewan officers began to piece the case together. They spent days on the investigation, collecting and examining evidence. As a result, numerous charges were laid against the trio. Remi Poulin was convicted of 11 counts under the Saskatchewan Wildlife Act



Part II The buck stopped here Alberta Fish and Wildlife Officer Lee Robley

(SWA) and one count under the federal Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act (WAPPRITTA).

Fines of \$6,835 were handed down, as well as a three-year hunting suspension and the forfeiture of his firearm (valued at \$5,000) to the provincial government. Yvon Poulin was convicted of eight counts under SWA and fined \$2,915, a hunting suspension of three years and forfeiture of his firearm (valued at \$3,500).

Bernard Metevier was convicted of nine counts under SWA. His fines were \$5,250, including a hunting suspension of three years and forfeiture of his firearm (valued at \$5,000). Saskatchewan investigators did not recover any of the antlers from the deer they had killed in Saskatchewan. The accused indicated they had simply thrown them away. All of the animals that were recovered were deemed unfit for human consumption and were therefore wasted. In spite of the evidence that had been gathered, there were still a low number of questions that had no answers. It was up to our counterparts in Alberta to fill in the gaps.

PART II

On Nov. 29, 2003, information was received at the Provost Fish and Wildlife office from Saskatchewan conservation officers (COs). They had apprehended and were investigating three Quebec hunters who had been shooting deer in Saskatchewan and only taking antlers. The suspects were Remi Poulin, Yvon Poulin and Bernard Metivier. Saskatchewan COs advised that all three men had Quebec addresses on their Saskatchewan hunting licences. Among the items seized from the men in Saskatchewan were photos, rifles, a rental vehicle and a GPS unit containing waypoint entries. During the course of their investigation, Saskatchewan officers had made several trips to the waypoint locations in Saskatchewan. This was the first time they had been able to visit the waypoints in Saskatchewan) where evidence against the hunters was obtained. Waypoint locations (taken from the seized GPS unit) were forwarded to the Provost investigator, as well as copies of some of the seized photos



showing the suspects with deer believed to have been taken in Alberta. It was determined that seven waypoint locations forwarded from the Saskatchewan COs were located in the Provost district in Alberta, and an investigation was initiated.

On Nov. 30, armed with aerial photos identifying the GPS locations and the waypoints entered onto another GPS unit, an investigator began a ground search that would last four days. On Dec. 3, with snow beginning to obscure visibility and having walked ever widening circles around the waypoint locations, hope was fading. As the officer was about to turn back to his patrol unit a magpie flew past him and he decided to follow along in that direction. After going another 150 yards into the bush he was about to turn back again, but the squawk of more birds led him on. The black and white scouts had done their job. The officer discovered a mule deer carcass with the antlers removed. Using a seized photo of two suspects with an antlered mule deer, he looked at the terrain and concluded that it was a match. Does a tree falling in the forest or an officer in the bush discovering critical evidence make a sound? He collected DNA samples and photographic evidence at the site. The importance of public participation in the reporting of offences cannot be overstated. Back on Nov. 22, 2003, a complainant had reported a whitetail buck that had been shot and left with only the antlers removed.

On Jan. 5, 2004, the investigating officer returned to that location with a new photo, one which had not been sites, they were submitted to the Fish and Wildlife forensic lab in Edmonton for DNA matching. DNA analysis done at the lab confirmed that three of the seven sets of antlers seized in Saskatchewan matched deer remains found at three kill sites in Alberta. Photo forensic analysis done by the Edmonton Police Service confirmed that the photos taken by the Alberta investigator at two of the kill sites in Alberta matched two of the locations depicted in the background of the photos seized by Saskatchewan officers, reaffirming the DNA analysis that three deer proven to have been shot in Alberta were Remi Poulin, Bernard Metivier and Yvon Poulin. Through the course of the investigation the Alberta Control Center, RELAS and ISM databases were queried and the name Mario Pepin emerged. Remi Poulin and Mario Pepin had been together on a guided hunt in Alberta

DNA samples and photos had also been collected by the officer in relation to another complaint received in November involving a mule deer that had been reported shot and left with its head removed. Both of these events had taken place in the general vicinity but not immediately near the waypoint locations that had been searched. DNA samples from the seven sets of antlers seized in Macklin Saskatchewan were obtained from Saskatchewan COs in name Mario Pepin emerged. Remi Poulin and Mario Pepin had been together on a guided hunt in Alberta

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non-resident Canadians from Quebec in November of 1995. Both men had obtained Alberta driver's licences on Nov. 20, 1995. They used the same Alberta address as their place of residence. A statement obtained by Alberta investigators from a person living at the address identified on Remi and Mario's driver's licences confirmed that neither had ever lived at that address. Both Remi and Mario had valid Quebec driver's licences at the same time they held valid Alberta driver's licences during the time period relating to this investigation.

Information received from Quebec provincial officers indicated that Mario Pepin and Remi Poulin had been registering big game animals taken outside Quebec resident hunting licences every year from 1995 to 2003 in Quebec. Statements taken by Canadian Wildlife Service officers in Quebec confirmed that Mario Pepin and Remi Poulin have been and remain residents of Quebec, never living in Alberta.

In between 1996 and 2003, Remi had hosted in Alberta as a resident and had hosted hunts in Alberta for Bernard Metivier, Yvon Poulin and others from Quebec. Mario Pepin, over the same time period, had also hunted in Alberta as a resident and had hosted hunts in the province for Veronique Levesque, Bernard Metivier and other Quebec residents. Both Mario and one of the named Quebec hunters he had hosted



registered elk taken in Alberta in 19

Licence vendor queries showed that Remi Poulin, Bernard Metivier and Mario Pepin acquired Alberta hunting licences at the same location on Nov. 15, 1999, in Calgary and on Nov. 16, 2000, in Calgary. In 2001, Poulin, Pepin, Metivier and Veronique Levesque acquired Alberta hunting licences at the same location on Nov. 15, in Calgary. In 2003, Remi Poulin, Bernard Metivier and Yvon Poulin acquired Alberta hunting licences on Nov. 16, at the same location in Calgary. Mario Pepin and Veronique Levesque acquired their 2003 Alberta hunting licences at the same location on Nov. 5, in Edmonton. Remi Poulin and Mario Pepin acquired Alberta resident hunting licences during all of the above transactions, while Bernard Metivier, Veronique Levesque and Yvon Poulin acquired non-resident Canadian licences.

Though not found to be involved with the three shot and left deer in Alberta in 2003, the above information, as obtained through the various data base queries and statements, resulted



Mario Pepin and Veronique Levesque obtaining a licence when ineligible (WA). On Pepin was ordered to pay \$7,000 in fines. Veronique Levesque of St. Benjamin, Quebec, pled guilty to one count of obtaining a licence when ineligible (WA). The court order signed by Judge P.T. Johnson stipulated that all five individuals:

Remi Poulin of St Joseph, Quebec, pled guilty to two counts of illegal possession under the Wildlife Act (WA), two counts of wastage (WA), one count of obtaining a licence when ineligible (WA) and one count of transporting illegally obtained wildlife across a provincial boundary, under WAPPRITTA.

- Are ineligible to obtain, hold or apply for a recreational hunting licence within the province of Alberta for five years commencing from the date of conviction;
- That all fines levied against them be paid to the Alberta Conservation Association and assigned to the University of Alberta for their use in obtaining material identified by the University of Alberta as essential to their research involving deer movement along the Alberta/ Saskatchewan border pertaining to chronic wasting disease;
- Must report to a Fish and Wildlife Division office in Alberta prior to obtaining a hunting licence or hunting in Alberta (for life).

Bernard Metivier of Victorin, Quebec, pled guilty to two counts of illegal possession (WA), two counts of wastage (WA) and one count of transporting illegally obtained wildlife across a provincial boundary (WAPPRITTA). Metivier was ordered to pay \$5,000 in fines.

Yvon Poulin of St. Benjamin, Quebec, pled guilty to two counts of illegal possession (WA), two counts of wastage (WA) and one count of transporting illegally obtained wildlife across a provincial boundary (WAPPRITTA).

There are questions relating to this that may never be answered. But if you have ever wondered to what lengths provincial or federal wildlife agencies and police services will go to see justice served, herein lies the answer.

