https://www.wyomingnews.com/rocketminer/news/state/disgruntled-neighbor-accused-of-defacing-195-head-of-cattle/article_8734f524-5e27-11ee-b2c7-f33b637a5789.html

Disgruntled neighbor accused of defacing 195 head of cattle

By Sarah Pridgeon Sundance Times Via Wyoming News Exchange
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SUNDANCE — Two ranchers face property destruction charges after using bleach to paint markings, including drawings of penises, on a total of 189 cows and six bulls belonging to their neighbor.

The father-son duo claimed their actions were intended to bring their neighbor's attention to the problem of broken fences that weren't being fixed quickly enough.

The markings led to an estimated loss in value for the cattle of $141,750.

According to the affidavit of probable cause, the Crook County Sheriff's Office received a complaint from a county rancher on June 21, stating that a neighbor had "bleached" his cows.

The alleged victim stated that his employee had noticed cattle had escaped their pasture and were on Sean Carroll's land. Another ranch hand was notified and was able to make it over to that area within a few hours to put them back, but could not find any out.

That evening, the employee and her father went to Carroll's corrals to retrieve the horses they had left there that morning after they finished helping with the Carrolls' branding.

According to court documents, they observed the corral to be full of cattle that Carroll was "marking" with bleach while two other men were helping push the cattle through the alley and chute.

According to the affidavit, the bleach was a peroxide mixture commonly used to mark cattle. The employee recognized the cattle as belonging to the victim and quickly loaded their horses and left after taking a picture of the cattle in the corral.

Pictures were also taken the next day, when the cattle were found back in the victim's pasture. They showed heifers that had been bleached all along their back; some had marks around their face and one had, says the affidavit, "what appeared to be an attempt at drawing a penis on her ribs."

The victim inquired about criminal charges for the loss of value of his cattle, which he planned to sell in the next couple of months as bred heifers. He explained that the markings could drastically decrease their value.

To give the victim time to gather the cattle, the Sheriff's Office deputy made a plan to meet at the corrals on July 3 to look at the totality of what had happened.

Meanwhile, the victim was asked about the fence between the properties and explained that it crosses a creek several times and, with all the recent rain, the water gaps get washed out and the cows can move right through the fence when the water goes down.

The victim stated that an arrangement to repair it was in the works with money being allocated from one of the ranches he leases, but he said that any deal with Carroll was off after the incident. He also stated that, after the incident, his ranch hand had rebuilt several water gaps in an attempt to fix the problem, while Carroll had sat on his porch "just watching them."

On July 3, the deputy returned to the ranch with a Wyoming livestock investigator and two Wyoming brand inspectors. The brand inspectors verified that all the cattle belonged to the victim and noted 189 heifers and six bulls with bleach marks.

The cattle were also inspected by a veterinarian for injuries resulting from the bleach because some of the initial pictures showed a paste-like residue that indicated it was mixed very thick. Few instances of skin irritation or damage were found, however, and no eye damage.

The markings were photographed. According to the deputy's report, they ranged from a football-sized spot on the back, to marks all over the face and around the eyes, to marks all the way down the spine and several penis-shaped drawings.

A local cattle dealer with whom the victim often does business was asked for input on the effect that the markings might have. The dealer, who sells up to 40,000 head of bred heifers every year, suggested that the markings might lower the price by between $500 and $700 per head.

The livestock investigator also stated that the markings would cause a significant loss in value because ranchers will recognize the bleached markings to mean there is a problem with the animal – or may simply not like the look of them compared to an unmarked heifer.

After speaking with several buyers, the dealer later provided valuations for the heifers of $2600 per head in normal condition but $1850 per head with the markings.

With these numbers, the total loss for the 189 heifers would be $141,750.

The deputy spoke with Sean Carroll, who said he would love to talk about what happened.

He allegedly stated that he has leased the ranch since 2014 but, over the last few years, the number of the victim's cows that get through the fence has increased to the point there will be "hundreds of cows out" at a time. Carroll stated that he finds it frustrating when he calls the victim to let him know and is met with a reaction that is "laid back like it's not a big deal."

According to Carroll, it sometimes takes a few days for the cows to be moved back. He allegedly admitted the fence is old and in poor condition but said that they try to fix problems when they see them.

According to court reports, Carroll admitted that he had decided it was time to get the victim's attention so, with his son, Tucker, and another man (who later stated that he was simply helping out and did not know what was actually happening, which was confirmed by both Carrolls), he used the bleach dye and "marked them up pretty good."

Tucker confirmed the story, according to court reports. He stated that the idea was to make a statement, because "enough was enough."

Patrick Sean Carroll faces two felony counts of property destruction and defacement, carrying maximum penalties of ten years of incarceration, a $10,000 fine or both (if the value of the property destroyed is $1000 or more).

Tucker Carroll faces two felony counts of property destruction and defacement and one felony count of aiding property destruction and defacement, carrying the same potential penalties.

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