

From the YakimaHerald.com Online News.

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Published on Saturday, January 26, 2008

Savage dog attack in Lower Valley injures man

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YAKIMA HERALD-REPUBLIC

A 55-year-old man collecting aluminum cans along a Lower Valley Road south of Wapato was seriously injured when he was attacked by five dogs Friday afternoon.

Officials said the attack was so savage it exposed bone and muscle in the man's leg.

The attack would have continued had the dogs not been scared off by a motorist who stopped and fired three rounds into the air from a 12-gauge shotgun, said Randy Sutton, Yakima County's deputy animal control officer.

The driver, who initially thought the dogs were playing with the man, then called 9-1-1 and flagged down a passing State Patrol trooper, Sutton said.

The 12:15 p.m. incident took place along Knight Lane near Campbell Road about a mile south of Wapato.

The victim was taken to a Yakima hospital, but no other information on his identity or condition was available Friday evening.

Yakima County deputies and an animal control agent were able to find and capture four of the dogs.

"The fifth dog was difficult to identify because no one could give us a description," Sutton said. "But four of the dogs still had blood on them."

The dogs were taken to the Humane Society of Central Washington on Birchfield Road in Yakima, where they will be held for a 10-day quarantine, Sutton said.

Afterward, the dogs' owner will have to make arrangements to have them destroyed, Sutton said.

He said the owner was cited for four counts of having an animal that is "permitted to cause serious injuries to humans," a gross misdemeanor that carries up to one year in jail and a \$5,000 fine.

Deputies would not release the name of the person they cited.

Stray dogs and dog attacks have been a problem in much of the Lower Yakima Valley for years.

The county has just two animal control officers who get up to 50 nonemergency calls, such as reports of strays, per day for the entire county. Officials say more funding would be available if more county residents were willing to license their dogs.

But last year, county officials estimated only 10 percent of dogs outside the Valley's 14 cities and towns cities were licensed, leaving an estimated 50,000 unlicensed dogs in the county.

Funding isn't the only problem in the Lower Valley. A checkerboard of tribal and nontribal land makes enforcement difficult because tribal land isn't subject to county dog ordinances.

In 2004, there was a particularly vicious attack in west Wapato, where 4-year-old Jose Basilio's arms were nearly torn from their sockets when he was set on by a half-dozen dogs. He was treated for six weeks at Harborview Medical Center in Seattle, where he was given a series of skin grafts to cover more than 60 deep bites to his head, back, legs and shoulders.