

February 2020 FF BCH
General Meeting
2/24/2020
Seafood Seller's

Call to order by Sally McDavid at 6:34 PM

In order to have more time for the presentation by Detective Helfritz, the minutes and the treasurer's report was postponed until the March meeting. The minutes from the January meeting and the February meeting and a current treasurer's report will be presented in March. Sally also reminded everyone that the president, treasurer and two board members are up for re-election at the March meeting. If you would like to nominate anyone for any position contact Fred Fulcher or you may nominate from the floor at the March meeting.

Detective Kyle Helfritz of the Citrus County Sheriff's Office spoke to the group about the recent spate of horse thefts and illegal horse slaughtering. While Citrus County has not had a reported incident, several surrounding counties have and it is well known to have been an issue in south Florida for some years. The presentation was intended to educate our members on staying safe and legal. The handout provided by Detective Helfritz is found on pages 3-4.

50/50 \$153.00 was won by Ruth Ann Donaldson.

Meeting adjourned at 7:30 PM

Illegal Horse Slaughtering & Thefts

Detective Kyle Helfritz - ID#1444

Citrus County Sheriff's Office

GENERAL / BACKGROUND

The illegal horse slaughtering began in south Florida. Thieves usually cut holes in fencing then drive vehicles onto the owner's property. The thieves either steal the horses and slaughter them off the property or, in some cases, slaughter the horse on the owner's property. In many documented cases in south Florida, the horses appeared to be professionally butchered and in other cases, inexperienced butchers committed the crime. In Florida, killing a horse with the intent of selling its meat for human consumption is a felony. Most illegal horsemeat sold in Florida is acquired from an illegal slaughterhouse. In Florida, knowingly transporting, distributing, selling, purchasing, or possessing horse meat for human consumption that is not clearly stamped, marked and described as horse meat for human consumption is a 3rd degree felony with a mandatory minimum fine of \$3,500 (Florida Statute 500.451).

An approximate value for the meat from a slaughtered horse could range from \$1,000 up to \$10,000. Prized racehorses fetch the most value for illegal horsemeat trading.

It appears, in Florida, illegal horse slaughtering and thefts originated from a subset of the Cuban population. These individuals believe horsemeat has "superior medical benefits." Medical benefits include: enhance libido, cure blood disorders, reduce side effects from chemotherapy, etc.

ANIMAL RECOVERY MISSION (ARM)

Animal Recovery Mission (ARM) is an investigative animal welfare organization developed in 2010 by Richard Couto, shortly after he was exposed to one of South Florida's most brutal animal cruelty operations. Richard has spent years undercover at illegal horse slaughtering farms throughout Florida. Their website is www.animalrecoverymission.org.

I was able to speak directly to Richard Couto. Richard advised he is working with numerous law enforcement agencies and state attorneys in Florida regarding the illegal horsemeat trade and slaughtering. ARM advised approximately 25 horses per week are being slaughtered at a farm in Ocala, Florida. Although, this does not mean these horses are stolen, the majority could be purchased at a relatively low price on websites. Since 2011, ARM documented 236 cases of illegal horse slaughtering in Florida.

Citrus County

As of today, there have been no reported horse thefts or illegal slaughtering of horses documented in our county. The sheriff's office is aware of the cases in surrounding counties and has been in contact with these agencies. Counties in the area are collecting intelligence on possible suspects and identifying suspicious persons. Deputies are doing their best, between calls for service, to conduct security checks in the areas where horses are located.

It is possible for these criminals to come to our county, this is why everyone needs to be aware of the issue and notify the sheriff's office of any suspicious persons or activity.

CITIZENS COMBATting THE ISSUE

Consider strategically placing security cameras on and around the property lines. Maintain fences and check them on a daily basis. Utilize no trespassing signs. If possible, keep horses close to residence or in stables during nighttime hours. Place motion sensor activated lights around barns and property where horses are kept. Perimeter alarms that sound when a fence is cut are also good precautions to implement.

Be cautious of who you let on your property. Some cases in South Florida appear to occur after a homeowner hired an individual to do work on their residence or around their property. If you do not know the person, I would suggest, do not let them on your property.

If you see something or someone suspicious, contact the sheriff's office immediately. Communicate with neighbors as much as possible about these suspicious persons and/or activity. If a suspicious person or vehicle is observed, attempt to write down the vehicle information, included tag state and number. If possible, photograph these suspicious vehicles and suspicious persons in the area. "PLEASE DO NOT PUT YOURSELF IN HARMS WAY"

Mr. Richard Couto advised the best preventative measure a citizen can implement is having a barking dog near where the horses are kept. Mr. Couto stated in all of the cases where the suspect left the incident location without stealing or slaughtering a horse, the residence had a barking dog on the property. Mr. Couto stated it does not have to be a big dog; the dog just needs to bark at suspicious persons.

DO NOT SHOOT A PERSON OR USE DEADLY FORCE ON A PERSON FOR JUST BEING ON YOUR PROPERTY. Lethal force is not justified for an individual merely trespassing on private property. Lethal force is not justified to prevent an individual from stealing your property.

AGRICULTURAL WATCH PROGRAM

I encourage all individuals here to set up a program in which all participants can freely share information in an efficient manner. Possibly, set up a private Facebook page in which all members can discuss suspicious events happening in the area and remain engaged.

TRESPASSING SIGNAGE

If the property is over 5 acres of land, no trespassing signs shall be placed NO more than 500 feet apart along, and at each corner of, the boundaries of the land, upon which signs there appears prominently, in letters of not less than 2 inches in height, the words "no trespassing" and in addition thereto the name of the owner, lessee, or occupant of said land. Said signs shall be placed along the boundary line of posted land in a manner and in such position as to be clearly noticeable from the boundary line.

It shall not be necessary to give notice by posting on any enclosed land or place not exceeding 5 acres in area on which there is a dwelling house. Florida Statute 810.011 (5) (A).

OTHER FLORIDA STATUTES

810.115- Breaking or injuring fences- becomes a 3rd degree felony if the fence or any part thereof is used to contain animals at the time of this offense.

810.125- Injury to certain trespassers on agricultural land- a person owning said land shall not be held liable for negligence related to such property that results in death of, injury to, or damage to a person who has engaged or is engaging in conduct on the property that is unlawful or unlawful trespassing.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

I know this is not what you all would like to hear but legally horses are personal property. A citizen should NOT use deadly force in protecting their property. I fully understand most of us believe that our animals/pets are members of our close family, unfortunately, under Florida law they are classified as personal property.

Please be aware, if someone is merely trespassing on your property, they are committing a misdemeanor crime. Causing harm to said person because an individual is simply trespassing can result in your arrest. Detaining an individual committing a misdemeanor can possibly result in a kidnapping or false imprisonment charge. Please remember you, as a human being, must be in a well-grounded reasonable fear for your life or the life of others to justify the use of deadly force.