

MOUNTAINS

WORD FROM THE SMOKIES

Wildlife biologist for Eastern Band of Cherokee shares indigenous knowledge



Frances Figart
Columnist
Citizen Times



Caleb Hickman holds a black rat snake captured and measured for census work. Image courtesy of Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. ASHEVILLE

The supervisory fisheries and wildlife biologist for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is Caleb Hickman. But Hickman is a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, one of two other federally recognized Cherokee tribes.

“We share a common ancestry here in the mountains,” Hickman said. “Ironically, I now live in the county named after the man that instituted the forced removal of my ancestors and the ethnic cleansing of many tribes by initiating the Indian Removal Act. That’s Andrew Jackson. So, in a way, I’ve come full circle on their behalf.”

Despite that unfortunate history, Hickman says he feels at home here in the Great Smoky Mountains, where he coordinates management and research projects for the protection of tribal resources that include game and non-game fish and wildlife species. He helps to choose priority species and their habitats to manage based on cultural, economic, and federal protective needs.

“We don’t have a large crew of biologists like Great Smoky Mountains National Park,” he said, “but we do have a lot of federal processes and we live in a biodiversity-rich place.”

Hickman and his crew focus on myriad aspects of biology and work with a variety of species, including the Smokies’ iconic black bears. In collaboration with the local hunting community, Hickman is currently deploying a ‘bear hair snare’ and camera-trapping project.

“This project requires us to evaluate pictures and collect DNA from hair off of a barbed wire in a baited area to determine more information about the population and its interactions with people,” he said. “We have received data from hunters for a variety of species. With their help we are able to figure out a lot of demographic information and distributions.”

When it comes to managing large wildlife, elk top this list. Some of the largest groups of reintroduced elk live in and along the Qualla Boundary, often crossing roads and creating a potential safety hazard. Elk-human interactions typically rise during the holidays when tourism traffic picks up.

“We hope to find coexistence with elk

and people so that both are safe and can be productive,” Hickman says. “People need to be able to view elk safely and get to work on time, while the elk need to find places to rest, eat, and find mates.”

Just as they value bear and elk, the Cherokee place great cultural significance on water. Walking into the pure water of a Smoky Mountain spring or stream can be considered a cleansing. In his fisheries work Hickman is helping lead efforts to restore native species that have declined or may have even been wiped out in certain areas. He recently published a paper on the curious fate of the EBCI’s stocked fish.

“We found that almost all of the trout we stocked do not just decompose but are rather eaten,” he said. “We believe they are eaten by otters but right now we want to confirm this. The answer can lead to other important questions associated with otter densities and impacts to other species as well as a subject called ‘nutrient subsidies’ that nobody is really assessing.”

Recently Hickman’s work has been

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Caleb Hickman releases the federally endangered Carolina northern flying squirrel as part of a nest box survey. IMAGE COURTESY OF EASTERN BAND OF CHEROKEE INDIANS

Police: Suspect found in Colorado after Asheville shooting

Joel Burgess

Asheville Citizen Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

An Asheville man who police say climbed into a drive-thru window to attack a worker, shot a man multiple times and fled from a police traffic stop has been apprehended in Colorado.

U.S. Marshals have arrested Ron Markece Logan, 28, charging him with multiple assaults and other crimes, according to a Dec. 3 release from the Asheville Police Department. Logan had been described as armed and dangerous, with police saying anyone encountering him should use extreme caution.

The charges Logan is facing are:

- Attempted first degree murder.
- Assault with a deadly weapon with the intent to kill and inflicting serious injury.
- Assault with a deadly weapon on a government official.
- Speeding to elude arrest.
- Simple assault.
- Injury to real property.
- Felony probation violation.
- Assault by pointing a gun.

On the night of Nov. 6, police say Logan partially climbed into the drive-thru window of a McDonald’s at 950 Patton Ave. and brandished a gun at an em-

ployee. The worker stabbed Logan in the chest with a pocket knife, resulting in a non-life threatening injury. Officers said the employee acted in self defense.

Later, in the early morning of Nov. 11, police say Logan shot a 31-year-old man “numerous times” on Granada Street in the West Asheville neighborhood of Pisgah View. Officers provided medical care for the victim who was in critical condition that day. On Dec. 3 APD spokeswoman Christina Hallingse said the man survived and is recovering from the gunshot wounds.

Nine days later on Nov. 20, police say they attempted to stop and arrest Logan

on Haywood Road in West Asheville, but he fled from the traffic stop in “an extremely erratic and reckless manner.”

At one point, he used his car against officers, resulting in the charge of assault with a deadly weapon on a government official, Hallingse said.

Joel Burgess has lived in WNC for more than 20 years, covering politics, government and other news. He’s written award-winning stories on topics ranging from gerrymandering to police use of force. Please help support this type of journalism with a subscription to the Citizen Times.

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