

**Jefferson County District Attorney Peter L. Deuel**

Jefferson County Courthouse

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CC:

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**Crooked River Ranch Administration Office**

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Dear Jefferson County District Attorney's Office and Commissioners:

I am dismayed that a case of aggravated animal abuse may result in probation for Crooked River Ranch resident Alan Whitacre. I understand Whitacre, 68, accepted a plea deal for the 2007 poisoning of his neighbor Ken Schmidt's dogs, Timber and Topaz. Whitacre allegedly gave the dogs meat laced with razor blades and fishhooks and peanut butter saturated in drain cleaner.

With the subsequent death of Topaz, Whitacre faced one count of felony aggravated animal abuse plus six misdemeanor counts of attempted aggravated animal abuse. In a final photo before her euthanasia, Topaz's exposed ribs revealed the severity of her suffering.

Yet the Jefferson County District Attorney's Office opted to bring back a plea offer that may land Whitacre some probation, restitution for veterinary bills, and limited local jail time. I respectfully urge you to forego plea bargains and lenient punishment. Please advocate maximum penalties for all counts of felony and misdemeanor animal abuse. Whitacre ought to undergo anger management counseling and be barred from contact with animals.

Whitacre claimed that after complaints to Schmidt and Jefferson County animal control, the dogs' continued barking caused him to "snap." Annoyed citizens, however, have no legal right to poison, maim and kill dogs. "A law enforcement officer or any other police, sheriff or dog control officer" cites a keeper or impounds any dog who causes a "Public Nuisance" as described under Jefferson County Ordinances (6.04.090 Public nuisance dogs).

Furthermore, violence against animals is a well-documented precursor to violence against humans — particularly vulnerable victims such as children, women or the elderly. Animal cruelty investigations often uncover domestic violence or other signs of a troubled family, P. Arkow notes in "Breaking the cycles of violence: A guide to multi-disciplinary interventions."

ASPCA's Randall Lockwood, Ph.D., notes that perpetrators who project blame onto their animal victims, tend to be "repeat offenders, less likely to take responsibility for their actions."

Deliberately poisoning two companion animals qualifies as abuse. Thank you for holding animal abusers accountable for their crimes.

Sincerely,