

# Lawsuit: Reaction to Pitkin County bear killing caused family trauma

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A Florida man repeatedly terrorized and harassed a hunter and his family over the legal killing of a bear a year ago to the point of inflicting “severe emotional distress,” according to a lawsuit filed last week.

Thomas Andersen — who pleaded guilty in April to felony attempted arson in connection with his reaction to the bear killing — allegedly tried to set the family’s car on fire, caused the hunter’s two young sons to be “terrified that Mr. Andersen will harm them or their parents” and threatened the family twice by phone in the months after the incident, according to the suit filed Thursday in Pitkin County District Court.

“The Huck family anxiously endured this repeated and ongoing harassment for months,” the lawsuit states. “They remain extremely concerned for their safety, and worry that Mr. Andersen will one day make good on his threats and set fire to their home or otherwise harm members of their family.”

Thomas Andersen — who owns a home on Lower Brush Creek Road near Snowmass Village — did not respond to a text message sent Monday seeking comment about the lawsuit. His Denver-based criminal lawyer said Monday he was not aware of the suit and was not representing Andersen anymore.

In addition to the attempted arson charge, Andersen also pleaded guilty to misdemeanor disorderly conduct and was sentenced in June to two years of probation and fined \$2,500. In exchange for the plea deal, the District Attorney’s Office agreed to wipe the felony from Andersen’s record if he stays out of trouble during the probation period.

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“Mr. Andersen’s pattern of disturbing and violent behavior towards the Huck family began Sept. 7, 2018” after Andersen witnessed Huck kill a bear on Brush Creek Ranch property next door to his home, the lawsuit states. Huck, whose 5- and 7-year-old sons were with him at the time, had a valid bear-hunting permit later confirmed by state wildlife officials and wanted the bear for food for his family.

Andersen “first approached the young boys in a highly agitated state and in an aggressive, threatening manner,” according to the lawsuit.

“Mr. Andersen began screaming at the young boys at the top of his lungs, yelling that (their) father was a ‘murderer’ and shouting at (them) that they were ‘little bastards,’ ‘sons of bitches’ and ... ‘little cowards’” the suit states. “The traumatic scene caused by this irate adult stranger caused the young boys to burst into tears and fear for the safety of themselves and their father.”

Huck tried to de-escalate the situation, but Andersen would not let him speak and showered him and his sons with obscenities for four to six minutes before Huck demanded that Andersen leave, according to the lawsuit. Andersen also “flew into another rage” when Pitkin County deputies visited his home and called “everyone – including the deputies – ‘dumbf—s,’ ‘hillbillies’ and other disparaging names,” the suit states. Andersen also insulted the Italian-American ancestry of one of the deputies and the Brush Creek Ranch caretaker.

Later that night, Huck and his sons were preparing to leave the ranch when they “noticed a strange liquid on the driveway near his vehicle” that turned out to be gasoline with strips of paper sticking out of it and a gas can nozzle laying nearby. One of the strips had the name of Andersen’s wife printed on it, according to the lawsuit.

Deputies returned to Andersen’s home, found a gas can missing a nozzle on his front porch and asked him about it.

“At least I didn’t start the fire,” Andersen reportedly said, according to the lawsuit.

The Lake Christine Fire was still burning in Basalt at the time and the entire Roaring Fork Valley “was a tinder box” because of extremely dry conditions, the suit states.

“Had Mr. Andersen carried through on his plan to start a fire, it is impossible to overstate the devastation and destruction that would have ensued,” according to the lawsuit.

Finally, Andersen or someone calling from a number registered to him called the Hucks on Dec. 22.

“Is this the Andrew that files false police reports?” the caller asked Huck after he answered, the lawsuit states. “You will be getting yours soon.”

Snowmass Village police determined the number was registered to Andersen, but he denied it when they called and asked him about it, the lawsuit states.

On March 23, Andersen left Huck “an ominous and ranting voicemail” at 2:33 a.m. warning him to “stay away from the property ... you’re a lawbreaker, Andrew,” according to the suit.

The suit seeks unspecified damages from Andersen.

“Mr. Andersen remains at large and has proven in the past to be an active and real threat to the Huck family,” the lawsuit states. “Mr. Andersen’s threatening and unlawful behavior have caused the Huck family severe emotional trauma, fear and mental anguish.”

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