

Woman trades her testimony for immunity in **spiking** case

By SHERRY DEVLIN
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A Missoula conservationist has been given immunity from prosecution in exchange for her testimony against two men accused of pounding bridge spikes into trees on Idaho's Clearwater National Forest four years ago.

Tracy Stone-Manning, executive director of the Five Valleys Land Trust, said she came forward with information in February after former Missoula resident John P. Blount was arrested and charged with **tree spiking**.

U.S. Attorney Maurice Ellsworth granted Stone-Manning limited immunity in exchange for her testimony, in March before a grand jury in Boise, Idaho, and at a trial now set for June 7 in either Spokane or Moscow, Idaho.

Following her grand jury testimony, the indictment against Blount was amended and expanded, and similar charges were filed against former Missoula resident Jeffrey C. Fairchild.

In an interview with the Missoulian, Stone-Manning said she was approached by Blount and Fairchild in the spring of 1989, as she was walking up the steps of Rankin Hall at the University of Montana. She was an environmental studies student at the time.

'Once he was in jail, I was safe. It was time to come forward. It was my responsibility.'

— Tracy Stone-Manning

Stone-Manning said Blount, who calls himself "Spicer," handed her a letter addressed to the U.S. Forest Service and said, "Read this."

In oftentimes-foul language, the letter declared that 500 pounds of spikes had been pounded into trees at the Post Office timber sale, on the Clearwater National Forest in Idaho. It warned the Forest Service **not to try to cut the trees**. **Tree spiking** is a form of environmental terrorism designed to block timber sales. Because they can shatter saws, **tree spikes** are dangerous both to loggers felling timber and to sawmill workers.

Blount asked Stone-Manning to mail the letter, she said. "He said, 'Would you mail this?' I asked, 'Why won't you?' And he said, 'I don't have a stamp.'"

"They were doing a lot of posturing and laughing and bragging," Stone-Manning said. "It was clear that they had really done this."

From that moment forward, Stone-Manning said, her life was turned upside down. "I took the letter and thought about what to do for a few days," she said. "If I didn't mail it, I was afraid someone would get hurt. If I gave it back to Spicer, though, I was afraid he wouldn't mail it."

Ultimately, she said, she took the letter to the UM library and, using one of the university's typewriters, retyped the letter, correcting misspellings and removing some of the expletives.

"I retyped it because my fingerprints were all over the original and I was scared," she said. "What I really feel, though, is that I reported a crime, although anonymously."

The letter prompted federal law enforcement officials to search a home on Sherwood Street in Missoula where several Earth First activists lived. In the fall of 1989, prosecutors subpoenaed seven Missoula residents, including Stone-Manning, to appear before a grand jury to provide physical

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evidence, including handwriting and hair samples.

In the meantime, Stone-Manning said, Blount left Missoula, taking a shotgun from the Sherwood Street home and threatening to kill anyone who told authorities about the **tree spiking**.

"I felt very physically threatened. I was scared witless," she said. Federal officials never asked her about the **tree spiking**, she

said, or she would have answered truthfully. She did not offer any information, though, out of fear for her life.

Stone-Manning said local Earth First activists never discussed and did not condone sabotage as a form of environmental protest. She said she has always denounced **tree spiking**.

Blount was indicted for the Post Office sale sabotage in February, while he was in jail in Colorado on kidnapping charges related to a child custody dispute.

He has pleaded innocent, as has Fairchild. In an earlier interview, Blount said he was set up by his common-law wife, Guenevere Lilburn, who wanted to deny him access to their young child.

The grand jury indictment charges Blount and Fairchild with

two counts each of **tree spiking**, willfully injuring or committing depredation against property of the United States and conspiracy.

A third defendant, Daniel Albert LaCrosse — also formerly of Missoula — was charged with two counts of conspiracy. He also has pleaded innocent.

Stone-Manning said she could have been charged with conspiracy because she mailed the letter for Blount, were it not for her agreement with the U.S. attorney.

In a letter to her attorney, Ellsworth said Stone-Manning "will be granted use immunity for the statements which she makes to the degree that it may incriminate her. She understands that this grant of use immunity is based upon the condition of complete truthfulness, and if she should tes-

tify differently at any trial or hearing, this statement may be used against her, or any other witness, for impeachment purposes."

Stone-Manning said

she immediately contacted a lawyer and offered her testimony when, in February, she read a newspaper account of Blount's arrest. "Once he was in jail, I was safe," she said. "It was time to come forward. It was my responsibility."

"What Spicer did to me was horrendous. I am really very, very angry about the position he put me in," Stone-Manning said. She said she is relieved to finally be able to make the information public.

Stone-Manning said she had no involvement in the incident, except

retyping and mailing the letter. At least two other people also have been given immunity in the case, although prosecutors will not reveal their names.

The grand jury indictment lists former Missoula resident Arvid E. Hartley as an "unindicted co-conspirator," saying he was approached in March 1989 by Blount and asked if he was interested in **spiking** trees.

The indictment alleges that Hartley, Blount and Fairchild "pounded spikes into trees and painted the trees with various slogans" during their March visit to the timber sale. In April 1989, Blount and Fairchild allegedly returned to the sale, using climbing equipment to pound additional spikes higher into trees.