

# Charlo man pleads not guilty to killing grizzly

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A Charlo man accused of illegally killing a grizzly bear in 2018 pleaded not guilty to the charge against him in federal court on Monday.

The man, Kevin Moll, entered his plea at an initial appearance in U.S. District Court in Missoula on Monday. Judge Kathleen DeSoto set a trial date of Dec. 9. If convicted of the charge against him — one count of unlawful taking of a threatened species — Moll faces a maximum penalty of six months in prison and a \$25,000 fine.

The charge against Moll, filed last month, on Sept. 12, stems from an incident alleged to have occurred around Sept. 26, 2018, in which Moll shot a female grizzly from his vehicle near Charlo, disposed of the carcass on a local dairy farm bone pile, and later removed and discarded the bear’s ear tag and tracking collar once he saw wildlife managers looking for the bear, according to charging documents. Grizzly bears are listed as threatened in the Lower 48 states, and federal law prohibits the unauthorized killing of the animals.

As a federal class-B misdemeanor, the charge does not qualify Moll for a jury trial. If the case goes to trial, Moll will receive a bench trial, with DeSoto determining his guilt or innocence after prosecutors and Moll’s defense attorneys present their case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Ryan Weldon is prosecuting the case. Moll is represented by John Rhodes, a federal public defender appointed by DeSoto, and Jessica Polan Wright, a private-practice attorney being mentored by Rhodes for public defense work.

Rhodes told DeSoto he had received information from prosecutors during discovery but had not yet had a chance to review the information. The review would take “at least 45 days,” he said. If necessary, Rhodes and Weldon said, they were open to Moll waiving his right to a speedy trial — a legal requirement that trials commence within 70 days unless a defendant agrees to a later date.

Charging documents filed in the case did not explain how officials initially connected Moll to the killing, or why it took four years to charge him with a crime. Asked about the delay after Monday’s hearing, Weldon declined to comment, as is standard practice for parties involved in active criminal prosecution.

*From Gazette news services*