

Bones found, murder suspected at scene of burned vehicle

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Colville, Wash.—Murder is suspected in the death of a person whose animal-scattered bones were found in and around a burned-out vehicle on a remote logging road about 15 miles north of here.

The remains were discovered Sunday by a hunter in the Flatcreek area southwest of Northport. Officers from the Stevens County Sheriff's Office and the Washington State Patrol searched the site Monday, and planned a wider search today.

"Based on the license plate number, we have a lead on the individuals," Coroner Jerry Wetle said.

He said authorities planned to contact the father of a young man who was reported missing last spring, but the remains have not been positively identified. In fact, Wetle said, authorities aren't sure whether the bones belong to one person or two.

"Based on what we found in the car area, it looks like it could be one person," Wetle said.

He said the sport-type, four-wheel-drive vehicle was open because of the fire, and animals widely scattered bones of the occupant or occupants. Wetle hoped an autopsy, tentatively planned today in Spokane, and a detailed search by Explorer Scouts would help determine the identity and number of victims.

The coroner said the missing man may have been seen with the registered owner of the vehicle. So far, though, Wetle said authorities don't know whether the owner is alive or dead, a suspect or a victim, or whether he is involved at all.

"Tomorrow we should know more," Wetle said.

Sheriff Craig Thayer couldn't be reached for comments.