Sonar fails to locate Good Samaritan missing at accident scene, presumed dead in John Day River

by Cheryl McDermott

Police officers failed in their efforts Tuesday to locate the body of a Good Samaritan motorist who is believed to have fallen off of a bridge or jumped to the icy waters of the John Day River 35-feet below in an effort to avoid being hit by a vehicle. He had stopped to render aid to the driver of another vehicle who had crashed into the center highway divider on late Sunday afternoon.

A side-scan sonar was used Tuesday for several hours, with the device set to deploy near the bottom of the river. It was pulled on a cable behind a boat steered by a Sherman County marine deputy, and was operated by two Multnomah County deputies assisted by an Oregon State Police sergeant.

Photo shows bridge on I-84 where the accident occurred. OSP photo. Inset: John Dickinson Sherman County Sheriffâ€™s deputies, OSP troopers, and the Army Corp of Engineers who operate the dam, plan to continue to search the area as weather permits.

John Dickinson, a 62-year old city councilman from Moscow, Idaho has been missing since January 7 about 6 p.m. He had stopped to render aid to Joanne Sutton, 25, of Portland, who swerved to avoid debris that was in the roadway as she traveled west on Interstate-84. Suttonâ€™s 1999 Plymouth Neon struck the center divider and came to rest blocking the slow lane of the freeway.

Dickinson stopped behind the crashed vehicle, and when he was aiding Sutton his Mini Cooper was struck from behind by a 1969 Pontiac Firebird driven by 42-year old David Grant of Portland.

Following the accident, OSP determined that Dickinson was missing and could not be accounted for. Because the accident occurred on a bridge spanning the mouth of the John Day River, police believe it is likely Dickinson either jumped or fell over the 3.5-foot tall concrete bridge railing.

A Sherman County Sheriffâ€™s office patrol boat searched the John Day River and portions of the Columbia River without success, and OSP troopers using FLIR (thermal imaging and infrared cameras) and night vision devices also searched the shoreline in the accident scene area. By late Monday the operation was called a recovery effort.

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