

Posted **October 16,**
2012

Updated **December 12,**
2014

Hunting season brings new hope in Ayla Reynolds case

WATERVILLE -- Hunters have often been key to finding clues that have helped the state's law enforcement solve cases, and when 200,000 hunters walk into the Maine woods this fall, many people are hoping they'll be alert for signs of Ayla Reynolds.

BY **BEN MCCANNA**



Share



Comment

WATERVILLE — Hunters have often been key to finding clues that have helped the state's law enforcement solve cases, and when 200,000 hunters walk into the Maine woods this fall, many people are hoping they'll be alert for signs of Ayla Reynolds.

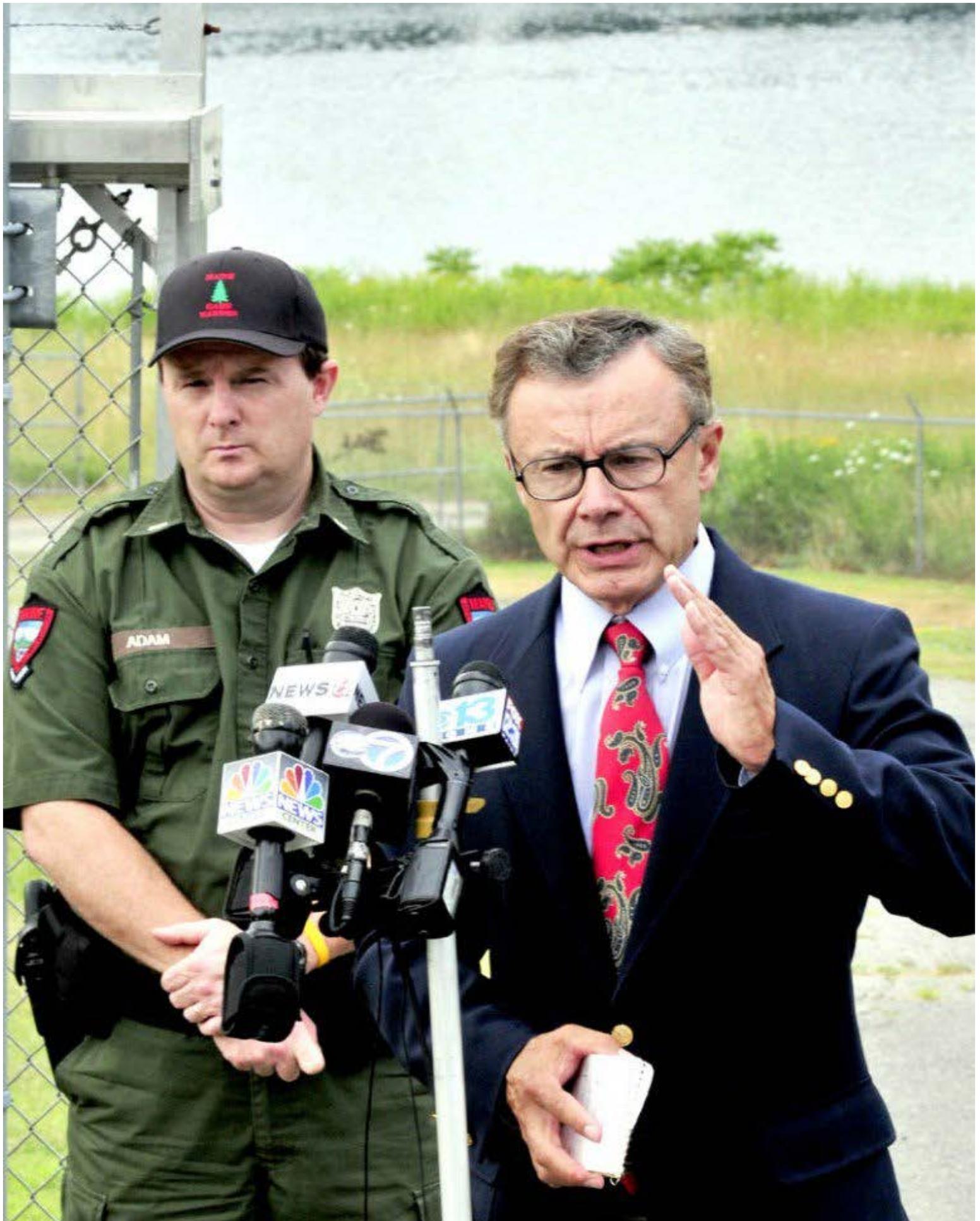
Today marks 10 months since the Waterville toddler disappeared from her father's house, but some followers at website United for Ayla haven't lost hope that she'll be found alive. They hope clues to her whereabouts might be out there somewhere, said site administrator John Pomerleau.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOS





FILE - This undated file photo obtained from a Facebook page shows toddler Ayla Reynolds, missing in Waterville, Maine. Reynolds was reported missing on Dec. 17, 2011 from the Waterville, Maine home of her father Justin DiPietro. With the reward expiring and the victim believed to be dead, the family is trying to move on despite not knowing what happened to the missing toddler. (AP Photo/obtained from Facebook, File) AP





File photo by David Learning Department of Public Safety Spokesman Steve McCausland, right, gives an update on the extensive search for Ayla Reynolds along the Kennebec River, in this file photo from July 17. At left is Lt. Kevin Adam of the Maine Warden Service.



File photo by David Learning Members of Maine Search and Rescue Dogs assemble at the Pan Am railroad yard in Waterville after searching the area for evidence of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds, in this file photo from July 17.



Search photos available for purchase: [Photo Store](#) →

“I don’t want to believe Ayla is gone,” he said. “If hunters are aware of their surroundings while they’re out there, maybe some evidence can be found that will lead us to where Ayla is.”

On Tuesday, Department of Public Safety spokesman Steve McCausland said there are no new developments in the case, but it remains very active and evidence processing continues at the state crime lab in Augusta.

“Detectives and lab technicians regularly talk on this case,” he said.

Pomerleau and others hope to catch hunters’ attention by distributing up to 1,000 posters about Ayla throughout Maine at locations including gun clubs, hunter licensing offices, game weigh-in stations and breakfast diners.

More than a dozen volunteers have begun distributing the posters from Saco to Caribou. Firearms season for deer hunting begins Oct. 27 for Maine residents and Oct. 29 for out-of-staters. Bow hunting season for deer began Sept. 29. Moose season also began last month in limited areas. About 200,000 people will hunt this year in Maine, according to an official with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

There is a long history of hunters in Maine recovering missing persons and finding clues to crimes.

In November 2010, hunters found bodies in Stacyville, Kingfield, Vassalboro and Belmont.

In September 2009, a bow hunter found a woman's body at a wildlife refuge in Saco.

In 2006, a hunter in Canaan found evidence connected to the disappearance of 38-year-old Cheryl Murdoch — a bloody tarp near the scene of her murder.

In November 2000, a hunter found the body of a man who had hung himself from a tree in Saco.

McCausland said he hopes they'll lend a hand in this case.

“In past cases of missing persons, we have always encouraged hunters to keep an eye out,” he said.

“Hunters are keenly observant as they're looking for deer. If there's anything that they might think is of interest or related to this case, we certainly encourage them to call us.”

Lt. Kevin Adam of the Maine Warden Service has also encouraged Mainers to search for clues in the Ayla case, but he has cautioned against overwhelming authorities with insignificant findings.

“If (people) find trash or garbage bags, or anything they can open and check out, I would say, ‘Open it and check it out,’” Adam said in April. “Then, if they find something they think is significant, they should leave it alone and call the local police to come and look at it.”

On Ayla's second birthday in April, administrators at website Answers for Ayla asked Maine residents to search their property for clues that might help investigators find the girl. The initiative was called a Gift for Ayla.

Answers for Ayla, which was started by Ayla's maternal step-grandfather Jeff Hanson, has since merged with website Justice for Ayla to become United for Ayla. The new website has three administrators and has an average of 300 page views per day, Pomerleau said. Pomerleau lives in Culpeper, Va., but learned of Ayla's disappearance through family members in central Maine.

Police have conducted many searches in Kennebec and Somerset counties since the toddler disappeared.

In March, during a day-long search in Waterville, Oakland, Fairfield and Norridgewock, police found the remains of Waterville resident Steven C. Brandon, who had been missing since February 2004, on the bank of Messalonskee Stream.

More recently, on Oct. 5, state police detectives returned to Messalonskee Stream after it had been drained by Kennebec Water District for routine maintenance. Detectives covered a half mile of riverbank upstream and downstream of the North Street bridge, but found nothing related to Ayla.

Ayla was reported missing on Dec. 17 by her father, Justin DiPietro. No one has been named as a suspect or a person of interest. DiPietro contends that Ayla was abducted. Investigators say a kidnapping did not happen and they believe the three adults who saw her last — her father, aunt Elisha DiPietro and Courtney Roberts — are withholding information in the case.

Investigators also believe Ayla is dead, something Pomerleau tries not to think about.

“I understand there’s a very good probability — based on what law enforcement has said — that she’s not going to be found alive, but we’re keeping that slim hope alive,” he said.

State police are asking that anyone with information call them at 624-7076. To learn more about the hunter awareness program or to volunteer, visit unitedforayla.com.

Ben McCanna — 861-9239

READ OR POST COMMENTS

Share



Were you interviewed for this story? If so, please fill out our [accuracy form](#)

[Send questions/comments to the editors.](#)

RECENT

READ

SHARED

Incident involving Fairfield police dog biting infant allegedly a handler error

Health bill vote delayed in House in setback to Trump, Ryan

Don McLean’s ex-wife says tweet constituted contempt