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Police say they won't stop searching until they find missing Waterville child Ayla Reynolds

A morning-long search in Oakland Wednesday of woods, a field and pond turned up no clues to what happened to the child reported missing nearly two years ago.

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Scores of police officers could be seen walking across a large field off Nike Lane, a dirt road off Hussey Hill, near Oak Street.

OAKLAND — A morning-long search Wednesday that included an area recently cleared for a subdivision turned up no clues in the investigation of missing Waterville child Ayla Reynolds.

“The update is, we did not find Ayla,” said Steve McCausland, spokesman for the Maine Department of Public Safety. “This is another of a series of searches we have conducted, and this will not be the last one.”

VIDEOS



ADDITIONAL PHOTOS



Officers from various agencies confer outside the Maine Warden Service Mobile Command Vehicle parked on Nike Lane in Oakland as officers searched the woods for signs of missing toddler Ayla Reynolds on Wednesday. *Staff photo by David Leaming*



More than 30 people began a search for missing child Ayla Reynolds in Oakland Wednesday morning. *Staff photo by David Leaming*



Steve McCausland, spokesman for the Maine Department of Public Safety, is surrounded by law enforcement officers and media during a press conference on Nike Lane in Oakland on Wednesday, following a search for missing toddler Ayla Reynolds. *Staff photo by David Leaming*



Ayla Reynolds Contributed photo



Game Warden Terry Hughes walks by as Dave Stevens watches the scene unfold as police searched for missing toddler Ayla Reynolds near his property on Nike Lane in Oakland on Wednesday. Stevens said he hopes they find the girl alive. *Staff photo by David Leaming*



Paul Stevens talks Monday about the police search for missing toddler Ayla Reynolds near his home on Hussey Hill Road in Oakland. *Staff photo by David Leaming*



David Stevens, left, said it was unerving that there was a search for Ayla Reynold's body on Wednesday near his home in Oakland. He was with his brother Wil, center, and their uncle, Paul, near the area being searched. *Staff photo by Scott Monroe*



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“We won’t stop searching until we find Ayla,” he said.

He said the investigation is still considered a missing person case, despite the fact authorities have said they no longer believe the toddler is alive.

“This is the largest criminal investigation in state history, and we won’t stop until we get that answer,” he said. “We will do additional searches and we will search until we find her.”

More than 30 state and local police, as well as wardens from the Maine Warden Service, scoured an area off Hussey Hill Road in Oakland, about six miles from the Violette Avenue home where the child was last seen. Both the house and the area searched Wednesday are a short distance from Route 137, which is Kennedy Memorial Drive in Waterville.

Ayla Reynolds has been missing since Dec. 17, 2011, when her father, Justin DiPietro, told police her bed was empty when he looked in on her in the morning.

McCausland said Wednesday afternoon at a news conference following the search that it began at 6 a.m. and was prompted by one of 1,400 tips received in the case. He said investigators had been led to the area at least three times and had done a preliminary search and it was time to do a comprehensive one.

Lt. Kevin Adam, of the Warden Service, said all that was found were animal bones, which were analyzed during the search.

The search

State police, Warden Service officials and Waterville and Oakland police began the search about 6 a.m. on Hussey Hill Road and on Nike Lane, a dirt road off Hussey.

The group included four tracking dog teams. Around 9 a.m., police officers left a field where they’d searched a 40-by-30-foot pond surrounded by cattails, stumps and large rocks. An area resident said that some of the land was cleared about a year ago.

Nike Lane leads into Ridgewood Estates, a fledgling development, new enough that it only has one house.

David Stevens, who has lived at the corner of Hussey Hill Road and Nike Lane for 14 years, said the large police presence Wednesday caused concern among neighborhood residents.

“If they find Ayla out there, it would be unnerving, because that would mean they dumped Ayla’s body while I was living here,” Stevens said as the search was underway. “I would rather see her found alive, with a friend.”

His uncle, Paul Stevens, who has lived in the area 59 years, said he has hunted and snowshoed extensively in the area. He said the Ridgewood Estates subdivision is about 100 acres.

The subdivision is owned by brothers Steve and Brian Michaud, of Oakland. Brian Michaud said Wednesday by telephone that a police detective notified him last week that the area would be searched,

but the detective did not elaborate.

Michaud learned Wednesday that it was in connection with the Ayla Reynolds case. He sympathizes with the family.

“It’s too bad that the family can’t get closure. That’s the sad part,” he said.

David Stevens said his 17-year-old son, Cody, saw police searching around 6:30 a.m. while he was waiting for the school bus. Stevens added that police were in the area with a dog about a month ago, and when he asked what was going on, they told him it was a training exercise.

Stevens said he has hunted the area, and the field with the pond was cleared about a year ago.

His brother, Will Stevens, said he owned the property where the pond is until about two years ago. He and others said they could not imagine how the Ayla case was connected to the area.

“I would be very alarmed to think that she could be up here,” Will Stevens said.

Roberto Martin built the house in Ridgewood Estates and said he plans to live there. He and his twin brother, Rigo, were allowed to go past yellow crime tape police tied across Nike Lane early Wednesday.

“I hope they find her,” Roberto Martin said of Ayla.

Authorities have said it is unlikely she is alive.

Residents Kim Dessent and David Hachey said they also saw police in the area a month ago and police said they were doing training.

“It’s kind of weird,” Dessent said. “Why here? What’s the connection?”

Hachey said police need someone who has information about the case to come forward and speak.

“Somebody’s got to crack,” he said.

The search Wednesday drew Desirree Spencer, from Fairfield, and Jean MacLaren, from Waterville. The women said they hope to see the missing child case resolved.

“I think you just want an end to it somehow,” MacLaren said.

She said the case has affected people in the Waterville area.

“I think it’s depressing. I do,” she said. “For one thing, they can’t figure out what happened. No one is

talking. It's just horrifying to me, if anything happened to a little girl that young."

When Ayla disappeared

DiPietro, moved from Portland to his mother's Violette Avenue home in October 2011 when he got temporary custody of Ayla. His mother, Phoebe, was to help care for her. She was not home the night Ayla disappeared, but Justin's sister, his girlfriend and their children were.

DiPietro told police that the last time he saw Ayla was Dec. 16, 2011, and he found her bed empty on the morning of Dec. 17. His call to police sparked a search that became a criminal investigation two weeks later.

DiPietro and his supporters maintain that Ayla was taken from the home by strangers, but McCausland has said that "doesn't pass the straight-face test."

Authorities say they think Ayla probably is dead and that DiPietro and the two adults who were at the Waterville home, his sister Elisha DiPietro and girlfriend Courtney Roberts, haven't told police everything they know.

Ayla's mother, Trista Reynolds, said recently that she is tired of waiting for an answer about what happened to her daughter. .

Reynolds has said DiPietro should be prosecuted in connection with Ayla's disappearance. She maintains police found Ayla's blood on the girl's slippers, on the sofa in the upstairs living room, on a doll's face, on a fan cord in the basement and on a plastic tote that had a bloody sheet inside it.

Splatters of Ayla's blood also were found on the floor and wall near DiPietro's bed in the home's basement, according to Reynolds. Descriptions of how much blood Reynolds said was shown to her by police ranged from dime-sized splatters on the wall and floor, to a silver-dollar sized blood stain on the upstairs sofa, to a fist-sized stain on DiPietro's mattress and sheet.

McCausland previously said authorities have "no reaction" to the details released by Reynolds.

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