

Cattle rustler pleads guilty

Tim PETRUK *The Canadian Press*

KAMLOOPS — A cowboy from Kamloops, who rustled cattle to sell on Kijiji, stole furniture and even made off with a kitchen sink will have to wait a couple weeks to find out how long he'll stay behind bars.

Jason McDowell pleaded guilty on Friday in provincial court to cattle theft and three counts of theft under \$5,000.

Court heard the 37-year-old farm manager and mechanic was working and living on a farm near Cache Creek in the summer of 2014 when he suddenly disappeared.

The court heard he took more than \$5,000 worth of furniture from the company-furnished home, where he was living with

his wife and six children, as well as a new kitchen sink, tools and a piece of machinery.

He left behind a \$6,000 bill for personal expenses on a company credit card, the court heard.

The family moved to Alberta, where McDowell worked on another farm near Hanna, 200 kilometres east of Calgary.

The court heard he listed 10 of the farm's branded cattle for sale on Kijiji in March, when his employer was on vacation, and sold the animals to an unsuspecting buyer for \$20,000.

The employer returned, found a note from McDowell that said he quit, and called police to report the theft.

McDowell was on the lam until July, when he was arrested in Kamloops and has remained in custody ever since.

Court heard the cattle are back with their rightful owner but officials haven't been able to recover the \$20,000.

Crown counsel Will Burrows said McDowell's crimes were well prepared.

"He put the cattle for sale on Kijiji and then sold them while his boss was out of town. It's pretty cold conduct," he told the court.

"He is, in my submission, essentially a man without conscience."

McDowell's criminal history, including multiple convictions for fraud and theft, dates back to 1997.

Burrows asked Kamloops provincial court Judge Roy Dickey for a three-year prison sentence.

McDowell asked Dickey for two years of house arrest so he can pay off his \$11,000 restitution bill.

"I understand what I did was criminal, selfish and hurtful," he said. "I am extremely sorry for the pain and suffering that I've caused."

Court heard McDowell is facing a civil lawsuit from the Alberta ranch owner.

Dickey said he'll take a couple weeks to decide on a sentence. McDowell is due back in court to set a sentencing date on Monday.