

Slert Murder Conviction Reversed for Third Time



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Kenneth Slert is handcuffed in February 2010, following a jury's guilty verdict in Lewis County Superior Court. Slert was convicted of second-degree murder in connection with a Packwood campsite shooting in 2000.

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By The Chronicle

The Washington State Court of Appeals has, for the third time, reversed a murder conviction for Kenneth Slert, the man accused of shooting and killing another man at a campsite off Skate Creek Road near Packwood 12 years ago.

The justices released the 36-page opinion Wednesday.

Lewis County Prosecutor Jonathan Meyer told The Chronicle that he will remove himself from the decision-making process now that the case has been returned to his office. Meyer represented Slert on the same case prior to being elected prosecutor in 2010.

He said his staff will ultimately make the decision on whether to accept the ruling, attempt to prosecute him for a fourth time or petition the state's Supreme Court for a review.

Slert appealed his 2010 conviction on the grounds that his rights to be present at all critical stages of the trial had been violated when a conference between attorneys resulted in the dismissal of four jurors during the 2010 trial. He was not present for the conference, according to the ruling.

Slert was sentenced to 22 ½ years in state prison Feb. 10, 2010, in Lewis County Superior Court.

The sentencing followed a jury's unanimous guilty verdict Feb. 2 at the conclusion of the third trial for Slert, who was accused of killing John Benson in 2000. Two previous convictions had been reversed.

Lewis County Superior Court Judge James Lawler issued the sentence, in the maximum range for second-degree murder.

Skert received 220 months on the murder conviction, and a 60-month enhancement for using a firearm.

Skert admitted to shooting Benson twice after an argument at a campground off of Skate Creek Road, but said he fired the shots in self-defense, according to court documents.

Former Lewis County Prosecutor Michael Golden said following the third conviction that he believed the issues that led to previous appeals had been rectified.

"We're confident in the outcome," he said at the time. "As confident as we can be."