

Accused Placer County eco-terrorist out of prison

By Denny Walsh and Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

Eric McDavid was running late for his interview Wednesday, unavoidably delayed when a detective asked to chat with him after he stopped at the Placer County Sheriff's Office to register as an arsonist.

After nine years in federal custody, McDavid, 37, had been out of prison just six days and was still adjusting to life on the outside.

Later that day, he sat in his parents' home, a large rustic cabin tucked among tall pines overlooking a ridge outside Foresthill in the Placer foothills. Balding and gaunt, he sat on a leather couch, beside his mother and girlfriend, as the morning sun streamed in through large picture windows and logs burning in the fireplace warmed the room.

"It's surreal," McDavid said. "It took at least the first few days. I was waking up in the middle of the night just trying to figure out if it's real still. I mean, how many times at night I'd wake up like, 'This is real. I'm not dreaming.'"

Until earlier this month, McDavid was scheduled to remain in prison another eight years – until Feb. 10, 2023 – following his 2007 conviction for conspiring to blow up and burn the Nimbus Dam, a U.S. Forest Service genetics lab and cellphone towers.

But in a twist described as unprecedented by the judge overseeing the case, McDavid won his release on Jan. 8 after agreeing to plead guilty to a lesser charge: a single count of conspiracy to attack a government facility that, had he made the same deal nine years earlier, would have cost him, at

most, five years in prison. That guilty plea, which came with a promise by McDavid not to appeal or sue the government, resulted in his immediate release. His previous conviction and sentence were wiped out by an order of the court.

Read the whole story