

FORT BRAGG, Calif. — Authorities say a fugitive who has been at large for more than a month in the redwoods of Northern California fired at law enforcement officials.

The suspect who has been at large for more than a month in the redwoods of northern California came into contact with authorities on Thursday but they didn't manage to capture him, a sheriff's official said. Mendocino County authorities say a group of Alameda County deputies conducting a search of the area for 35-year-old Aaron Bassler came under fire just before noon Thursday. Bassler is suspected of killing a city councilman and one other person.

Mendocino County Sheriff Tom Allman says deputies were not hit and returned fire. Allman did not know how many shots Bassler fired, or if he had been wounded in the exchange. Deputies fired about 10 shots. More law enforcement officers were being flown into the area to join the 40 officers involved in the search. Bassler has been at large in the redwoods outside of Fort Bragg since Aug. 27, when he allegedly shot dead City Councilman Jere Melo.

Melo, who also worked as a security contractor, and a co-worker at a private timber company confronted Bassler while investigating reports of an illegal marijuana farm outside of town. Police say Bassler was cultivating some 400 poppy plants and was holed up in a makeshift bunker when he fired on the 69-year-old Melo and the co-worker, who escaped and called for help.

Bassler is also being sought in the fatal shooting of Matthew Coleman of the Mendocino County Land Trust. The former Fish and Game Department employee was found dead next to his car on Aug. 11 up the coast from Fort Bragg.

Both men were highly respected for their love of the land and their community work. The 7,000 residents of Fort Bragg have been on edge while the manhunt by dozens of local and federal agents has enveloped their coastal fishing and lumber community.

The search for Bassler, who is believed by authorities to have broken into several cabins to steal food and at least two other weapons, is the largest manhunt in Northern California in decades. Bassler said he believes his son suffers from schizophrenia and for years has talked about aliens and spaceships, while crafting Chinese military stars and drawings of weapons systems. His son was arrested in 2009 after he was accused of flinging some of those red stars over the fence of the Chinese consulate in San Francisco, but was released after authorities determined he was not an immediate threat to himself or others.

Bassler was arrested again on DUI charges in February after he allegedly rammed his truck into a school tennis court. He lost his license, and shortly afterward, lost his place to live. "He lost his truck, then he lost his place to live; all his links to the real world," his father said in an interview last week.

Earlier this week, authorities released a photo of Bassler vandalizing a vacation cabin while holding a high-caliber rifle. On Wednesday, they confirmed his fingerprints linked him to another burglary at a cabin. James Bassler said he had tried for years to get county authorities to have his son put into a mental health program, but that his letters and calls had gone unanswered due to privacy laws that protect his son..