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Lucas could not have committed murders, Mattox indicates

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AUSTIN — Texas Attorney General Jim Mattox said Tuesday an investigation into the case of convicted killer Henry Lee Lucas shows that he could not have committed the hundreds of cross-country murders to which he once confessed.

Mattox said his office soon would issue a report dealing with Lucas and the Texas Rangers task force that helped law enforcement authorities across the nation close the books on unsolved murders they eventually blamed on Lucas.

The attorney general said Gov. Mark White and the state Public Safety Commission, which oversees the Department of Public Safety, should review the findings to decide if action should be taken against the Texas Rangers.

"It's obvious that a great miscarriage of justice took place, and

it brought about a level of disrespect for our criminal justice system," Mattox said at a news conference to announce his re-election campaign.

"I think that we will never know how many crimes he actually committed," Mattox said. "But we do know that he could not have committed a great number of the ones that he accepted responsibility for."

Lucas has recanted all but three of the murder confessions since some officials questioned how he could have committed certain slayings when evidence indicated he had been in other parts of the country at the times.

He faces the death penalty for his 1983 conviction of a Williamson County murder, and he is on trial in El Paso for murder.

Col. Jim Adams, director of the Department of Public Safety, said the Public Safety Commission al-

ready had reviewed the activities of the task force.

The commission "has been satisfied that the Rangers have competently performed their duties," Adams said.

"Law enforcement agencies of this country, including the Texas Rangers, have by their own investigations rejected a substantial number of confessions made by Henry Lucas," Adams said. "This clearly indicates that there has been no rush to judgment which would warrant a general indictment of law enforcement agencies."

Mattox said his investigation reinforces a Lubbock couple's claims that Lucas could not have killed their daughter 10 years ago. An indictment charging Lucas with the Lubbock murder was dropped by prosecutors there.

The couple, Bob and Joyce Lemons, met Tuesday with Public

Safety commissioner John Fainter to air their complaints.

"Of course they are very convinced that Lucas did not commit the crime of killing their daughter. We are convinced of that also," Mattox said. "They believe this whole activity has delayed and perhaps forever done away with the possibility that the true criminal who committed this crime will ever be apprehended.

"We have found numerous other examples of situations where investigations and prosecutions were stalled as a result of that (Rangers) task force's actions," the attorney general said.

Ron Dusek, a spokesman for Mattox, said McLennan County District Attorney Vic Feazell might have played a role in the attorney general's investigation. Feazell has been involved in a war of words with the Department of Public Safety since a McLennan

County grand jury no-billed Lucas in connection with three murders and Feazell publicly criticized the Rangers task force.

Feazell "may have stimulated part of the investigation with various questions and things, but he

wasn't the sole stimulus, of course," Dusek said.