



NEWS RELEASE

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INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE INVESTIGATION RESULTS IN CONVICTION AGAINST HAINES BIG GAME GUIDE

Anchorage, Alaska- U.S. Attorney Karen L. Loeffler announced today that a joint United States-Canadian wildlife investigation has resulted in the conviction after a jury trial against Haines, Alaska, big game guide John Katzeek. Katzeek, who has been a big game guide for over twenty years, was convicted by a Juneau jury for a felony violation of the Lacey Act in connection with a guided hunt with two Canadian citizens. The jury convicted Katzeek of making a false record concerning his guide hunt records which are provided to the state of Alaska. The indictment alleged that Katzeek, age 64, filed false paperwork concerning the amount of meat taken from the field, most of which was left to waste, and that he failed to accurately report the date of the hunt and the identify of the assistant guide who participated on the hunt, instead, falsely using another assistant guide's name who did not participate on the particular guided hunt in question. Sentencing for Katzeek has been set for June 23, 2014, in Juneau, Alaska. The maximum penalty for violating the Lacey Act is 5 years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.

Also charged with Katzeek were Alberta, Canada, residents Brian Hicken, age 54, Kenneth Cox, 49, and Tyler Antal, 22. All three were acquitted by the jury for conspiracy and filing false documents in connection with a different hunt with Katzeek which occurred in October, 2010. Katzeek was also acquitted of two other violations alleging smuggling of dall sheep horns and the failure to truthfully report the specific location of a dall sheep killed in the Yukon Wildlife Sanctuary, near Kluane National Park.

The guided hunt for which Katzeek stands convicted occurred in October, 2011 near Haines, Alaska. The prosecution leading to this conviction is the result of a large scale and joint United States, State of Alaska and Canadian investigation known as "Operation Bruin." Starting in January, 2013, Canada Crown prosecutors in Alberta, and Yukon Territory Canada charged approximately seventeen (17) subjects with fifty-five (55) violations under the Canadian Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act (WAPPRIITA). These charges were in relation to the illegal guided hunts and the illegal import of unlawful wildlife from the United States into Canada. All of the hunts under investigation took place near Haines, Alaska and involved Alaska big game guides Ron Martin and John Katzeek. The Canadian trials are scheduled to begin in late Spring, 2014.

On January 13, 2014, two defendants that were charged by the state of Alaska as part of Operation Bruin were sentenced in Haines District Court. Wallace "Scott" Keele, age 53, and Melvin Price, age 54, both of Heber City, UT pled guilty to charges stemming from the illegal take of brown bear over bait.

Keele pled guilty to taking a brown bear over bait and to unlawful possession and transportation of game. He was fined \$10,000 with \$5,000 suspended, his hunting license is revoked for two years, must forfeit the brown bear and pay restitution to the State of Alaska in the amount of \$1,300.

Price pled guilty to taking a mountain goat without an appropriate tag and to unlawful possession and transportation of game. He was fined \$6,000 with \$2,500 suspended, his hunting license is revoked for two years, must forfeit the mountain goat and pay restitution to the State of Alaska in the amount of \$2,000. Additionally, as part of his agreement with the government, Price will forfeit three taxidermy trophies, to include a life size brown bear and black bear, and a shoulder mount Yukon moose which illegally harvested and transported in foreign or interstate commerce. Both Keele and Price were Ron Martin clients.

In October, 2013, Ronald L. Martin, 72, of Haines, Alaska, a big game guide in Haines for over 30 years, pled guilty and was sentenced before U.S. District Court Judge Timothy M. Burgess, after admitting to multiple illegal hunts, falsification of numerous documents related to those illegal hunts and the importation of illegal wildlife from Canada into the United States. Martin was sentenced to pay a \$40,000 fine and was placed on probation for four years. During the term of probation, Martin cannot hunt in the United States and is banned from hunting anywhere in the world for two years. Additionally, the plea agreement bars Martin from providing any guiding related services as part of his federal probation conditions. Martin was also ordered to forfeit all illegal wildlife seized in the investigation and a 27' enclosed trailer used in illegally importing wildlife into the U.S.

Prior to Martin pleading guilty in federal court, he also pled guilty and was sentenced in Alaska State court on one count of guiding clients for brown bear over bait, and one count of guiding clients over an unregistered bear bait site. As part of that State conviction, Martin was fined \$40,000 with \$30,000 suspended, and forfeited the following items to the State of Alaska: a PA-18 Piper Supercub airplane, a F250 Ford pickup truck, a Honda ATV - Foreman, and a Kimber .338 Caliber rifle with a Leopold Scope. Martin's hunting license was also revoked until May 2016 and he is prohibited from guiding, outfitting, or transporting hunters, to include not accompanying or assisting hunters in the field. Martin is further prohibited from acting as consultant, expediting, booking, or renting hunting equipment, and cannot apply for a hunting license until 2018. Martin was also required to surrender his guide license for life.

The investigation as to Martin documented 10 illegal brown bear hunts, three illegal black bear hunts, and four illegal mountain goat hunts totaling a value of approximately \$189,000. The violations which occurred during the hunts involved Martin allowing his Canadian and U.S. clients to take brown bears over bait, hunting without the required licenses or tags, and the failure to have a licensed guide with the non-resident alien clients during guided hunts. The investigation revealed that Martin's clients and Martin would file false documents to conceal the illegal nature of the guided hunts and would then smuggle the wildlife from the U.S. to Canada, all of which violated the Lacey Act and Canada's Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act (WAPPRIITA). The investigation showed the violations occurred between May 2002 through November 2011, in and around the Haines, Alaska area.

The investigation also documented that Martin illegally imported dall sheep from Yukon, Canada, into the U.S. during the fall of 2011 by failing to obtain a Yukon Wildlife Export permit and illegally smuggled the sheep horns from Canada into the U.S. by concealing the horns and meat in his

trailer. Martin has been charged by Environment Canada, with thirty-three WAPPRIITA violations all stemming from illegal wildlife including two dall sheep, one grizzly bear from the Yukon and two brown bears and one black bear from Alaska. Martin is scheduled for his court appearance in Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada on February 17, 2014.

In the Katzeek trial, four individuals testified against Katzeek, all of whom have plead guilty to wildlife violations in connection with either Katzeek or Martin. Jason Hjesvold, a Canadian hunter who participated in the hunt which generated Katzeek's count of conviction, is scheduled to plead guilty in Haines district court for violations stemming from removing the trophy before meat, and waste of game meat. Hjesvold is also facing WAPRIITA charges in Canada. Luke Johnson, from Burwash Landing, has plead guilty in the Yukon for assisting Katzeek in the smuggling of dall sheep horns from the Yukon into the United States. Stuart Dewitt, of Haines, Alaska, is pleading guilty to state of Alaska charges for illegal guiding undertaken with Katzeek and Martin. Part of Dewitt's sentence includes Dewitt forfeiting his big game guide license for life. Colton Baker, 23, formerly of Juneau, Alaska, also pled guilty to wildlife violations in the Yukon undertaken with Ron Martin.

On March 22, 2013, Lyle Whitmarsh, a client of Martin, was convicted in Alberta provincial court of one count of illegally possessing and importing a brown bear into Canada. Whitmarsh was sentenced to pay a penalty of \$4,000 for violating section 6(1) of the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act. In addition to the \$4,000 penalty, Lyle Whitmarsh is prohibited for two years of importing wildlife into Canada and is also required to forfeit the brown bear hide and skull seized during the investigation. \$3,600 of the penalty will go into the Environmental Damages Fund (EDF).

On October 16, 2013, John (Jack) Whitmarsh, brother of Lyle and a client of Martin's, was also convicted in Canada of two counts of illegally possessing and importing into Canada a brown bear. John Whitmarsh was sentenced to pay a penalty of \$15,000 for violating section 6(1) and 8(a) of the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act. In addition to the \$15,000 penalty, John Whitmarsh is prohibited for two years of importing wildlife into Canada and traveling outside of Alberta and Canada for the purposes of hunting. He is also required to forfeit the brown bear hide and skull seized during the investigation. \$13,500 of the penalty will go into the Candian Environmental Damages Fund (EDF).

Stanley Pruszenski, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska, said "Alaska's wildlife is one of its most precious resources. Big game guiding for Alaska's wildlife, no matter what the species, is a lure to hunters all over the world. Guiding for Alaska's big game commands big money, and even bigger responsibilities. It's a serious business which must be done right. Operation Bruin has revealed the illegal guiding activities of two established big game guides operating in the Chilkat Valley, and the extent to which they concealed their illegal guiding activity for literally years. This international investigation and the cooperation between nations, along with these felony convictions should send the message that no guide is above the law."

The investigation remains ongoing.

Kevin Feldis, First Assistant United States Attorney, emphasized that "the United States is committed to protecting the wildlife and natural resources of the state and ensuring that big game guides and hunters follow federal law. Illegal guiding and hunting activities destroy resources for everyone and we are fortunate to have dedicated investigators both in the United States and in Canada who work together to bring violators to justice."

United States Attorney Karen Loeffler commends the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Wildlife Troopers, Environment Canada, Yukon Conservation Officer Service, Alberta Fish and

Game, Parks Canada, British Columbia Conservation Officer Service and the Public Prosecution Service of Canada for the international cooperation extended in the investigation of these cases.

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