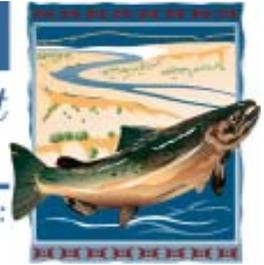


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

*Hanford Reach National Monument  
Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuge*

*... protecting the last of the free-flowing Columbia River.*



**December 15**

## **Investigation Leads to Arrest of Poachers at Hanford**

Investigators from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife have charged 10 Washington men with the illegal killing of at least seven large buck deer and bull elk on the Hanford Reach National Monument. The men would trespass onto the closed lands of the Fitzner/Eberhardt Arid Lands Ecology Reserve (ALE) Unit of the Monument. The animals appear to be left where they lay and only the head and antlers were taken. A tip regarding a pickup truck that was sighted in Goldendale, Washington, hauling deer heads, and a car with a large set of antlers in the back led to the investigation of Michael James Gates, who fled to Oregon once he learned wildlife officers were searching for him. Nearly two years later, Gates was served with a Federal summons and pled guilty in U.S. District Court in November. Investigators delayed serving Gates until the full extent of the poaching organization could be determined.

It appears that Gates was the organizer of the poaching and the others went along, attracted with the opportunity to shoot a large deer or elk. The men were dropped off to enter the ALE on foot, and picked up later at a designated location. Investigators from the Service's forensic lab in Ashland, Oregon, used DNA testing to match samples taken from the dead animals, or their bones found on the Monument, with blood samples on hunting knives and from recovered antlers, some of which were hanging in the poacher's houses. The offenders went as far as taking pictures of themselves with their illegal trophies. The confiscated antlers will be used by the Monument and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife for outreach and environmental education programs.

The success of this case underscores the cooperation and professionalism exhibited between Federal and State wildlife officers, FWS's forensic lab, and Hanford Reach National Monument staff.

