

## Special Agent Honored as North America's Wildlife "Officer of the Year"

Senior Special Agent Justin Mays, who works for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement in Iowa, has received the North American Wildlife Enforcement Officers Association's (NAWEOA) 2012 Officer of the Year Award.

The honor, which was presented to Mays by Association President Richard Cramer at that organization's annual conference in Tucson, Arizona, on July 25, 2012, singles out one conservation officer each year for outstanding "on-the-ground" wildlife law enforcement accomplishments and all-around professionalism. Mays is only the second U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officer to receive this award in its 19-year history.

Mays was honored by the Association for his skills and accomplishments as a criminal investigator; his successful partnerships with State agencies in Iowa, Missouri and other States; and his outstanding covert work on cases exposing illegal take and trafficking of federally and State protected wildlife resources.

That covert work included going undercover in a cooperative Service/Environment Canada investigation of a waterfowl hunting celebrity/video producer in what ranks as the largest commercial waterfowl case in recent memory. The probe resulted in a 23-count Federal grand jury indictment; criminal charges in Alberta Provincial Court in Canada; and guilty pleas in both countries. In another recent case, Mays assisted Service special agents in Alaska by establishing covert contacts with a man and his wife who were ultimately sentenced to prison terms of 9 and 3½ years for trafficking in walrus ivory, polar bear hides, and automatic weapons.

As the lead Federal wildlife investigator in the State of Iowa for much of his 15-year law enforcement career, Mays has established and maintained an effective partnership with the Special Investigations Unit of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. These efforts secured the Federal felony conviction of an Iowa outfitter who went to prison for one year and paid \$33,500 in fines and restitution for the illegal sale of trophy deer as well as substantial State fines and equipment forfeitures for unlawful grizzly bear hunting in Alaska.

A concurrent cooperative covert investigation exposed another Iowa outfitter who was illegally selling deer hunts to some 75 non-resident hunters while failing to report his guiding fees as income on his Federal tax return. This individual pleaded guilty to Lacey Act violations, mail fraud, and tax evasion counts and was sentenced to 21 months in Federal prison and fined \$14,080.

Mays was also honored for completing the largest poaching case in Iowa history – a case that sent the main defendant to Federal prison for nearly 5 years, secured \$62,500 in fines and restitution, and put an end to a 10-year poaching spree. Other high-profile cases cited by the Association included Mays' successful investigation of an Iowa man who had been killing bald and golden eagles and selling their parts since 1972 and surveillance work during his first Service assignment in Oklahoma that documented unlawful interstate transport of paddlefish roe.

A native of Nebraska, Mays joined the Service as a special agent in 2001 after serving 4½ years as a game warden with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. He holds a B.S. degree in wildlife biology from Adams State College in Colorado.

The NAWEOA is a professional organization focused on supporting and enhancing the work of wildlife law enforcement officers in North America. Its members include over 8,000 Federal, State, and Provincial wildlife enforcement officers from the United States and Canada.