



## NEWS RELEASE

**Eileen M. Decker**

United States Attorney  
Central District of California

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Thom Mrozek, Public Affairs Officer

[thom.mrozek@usdoj.gov](mailto:thom.mrozek@usdoj.gov)

(213) 894-6947

[www.justice.gov/usao-cdca](http://www.justice.gov/usao-cdca)

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### **Former San Fernando Valley Man Pleads Guilty to Smuggling Protected South American Fish Species to Canada**

LOS ANGELES – A man who was recently extradited from Mexico to face federal charges related to the illegal trafficking of the world's largest freshwater fish pleaded guilty this afternoon to smuggling two *Arapaima gigas* to Canada.

Isaac Zimmerman, 66, who formerly resided in West Hills, pleaded guilty today to the smuggling charge before United States District Judge Otis D. Wright II.

In a plea agreement filed yesterday in United States District Court, Zimmerman admitted that he smuggled two *Arapaima gigas* to Canada. At the time, Zimmerman knew that he was illegally exporting the fish because they are protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and they could not be exported to another country without a CITES re-export permit, which he did not have.

Zimmerman was initially charged in 2009, along with his company, River Wonders LLC, and his wife, Leonor Catalina Zimmerman.

River Wonders also pleaded guilty this afternoon to attempted smuggling of 10 *Arapaima gigas* to a resort in the Bahamas.

While Leonor Zimmerman pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor offense in 2010, Isaac Zimmerman fled the United States that same year after prosecutors filed additional charges alleging that he continued to illegally export fish while on bond. Special agents with the United States Fish & Wildlife Service tracked Zimmerman's movements through Europe, to Israel and eventually to Mexico.

On March 3, 2015, concluding a four-year manhunt, Zimmerman was arrested near Metepec, Mexico. During his flight to avoid prosecution, Zimmerman changed his appearance and took other steps to avoid detection and arrest. Mexico extradited Zimmerman in September.

As a result of today's guilty plea, Zimmerman faces a statutory maximum sentence of 10 years in federal prison when he is sentenced by Judge Wright on February 8.

Leonor Zimmerman pleaded guilty in 2010 to a misdemeanor count of illegal fish trafficking. She was sentenced by United States District Judge Valerie Baker Fairbank in January 2011 to 21 months of probation and was ordered to pay a \$1,500 fine.

The arrest of Isaac Zimmerman concluded a four-year manhunt led by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service, which received assistance from the Mexico City attaché of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the FWS Intel Unit, Interpol, the U.S. Department of Justice's Environment and Natural Resources Division, and the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of International Affairs.

CONTACT: Assistant United States Attorney Diana M. Kwok  
Environmental and Community Safety Crimes Section  
(213) 894-6529

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