



NEWS RELEASE

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**INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE INVESTIGATION RESULTS IN CONVICTION OF
HAINES BIG GAME GUIDE FOR ILLEGAL TAKE, FALSE LABELING
AND ILLEGAL IMPORTATION OF WILDLIFE**

Anchorage, Alaska - U.S. Attorney Karen L. Loeffler announced today that a Haines, Alaska, resident was sentenced in federal court in Juneau on five felony Lacey Act counts involving illegal take of wildlife, false labeling, and illegal importation of wildlife.

Ronald L. Martin, 72, of Haines, Alaska, a big game guide in Haines for over 30 years, pled guilty and was sentenced yesterday 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 the defendant's plea in federal court, Martin had pled 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.

According to Assistant U.S. Attorney Jack S. Schmidt, who prosecuted the federal case, the case arose from a joint United States-Canadian wildlife investigation called "Operation Bruin." The investigation 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.

Recently in Operation Bruin, Haines big game guide John Katzeek and three of his Canadian clients were indicted in U.S. District Court for the District of Alaska. The four individuals were charged with Lacey Act, conspiracy and smuggling violations related to the illegal take, commercialization and smuggling of Alaska big game animals.

Starting in November 2012, Environment Canada and Canadian Crown prosecutors in Alberta, and Yukon Territory, Canada, charged approximately 17 subjects with 55 violations under the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act. These charges pertained to the illegal guided hunts noted previously, and the illegal import of unlawful wildlife from the U.S. into Canada.

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 Environmental Damages Fund (EDF).

Some trial dates have been set for the remaining 15 Canadian defendants charged under Canadian law.

Stanley Pruszenski, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Special Agent in Charge of the Alaska Region, congratulates all the agencies involved in the successful investigation and prosecution of the large scale abuses of U.S. and international wildlife law in this case. The Fish and Wildlife Service is committed to protecting America's wildlife resources that are at risk from illegal take, commercialization, and smuggling. This case is an excellent example of how these types of investigations and prosecutions can only be successfully accomplished with cooperation and close working relationships between our U.S. and international partners.

Ms. Loeffler commends the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Wildlife Troopers; Environment Canada Wildlife Enforcement Directorate; Yukon Conservation Officer Service; Alberta Fish and Wildlife; Parks Canada; British Columbia Conservation Officer Service and the Public Prosecution Service of Canada for their investigative work in the prosecution of Martin.

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