

Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Pacific Regional Office
911 NE 11th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97232-4181
Phone: 503/231-6121
Fax: 503/231-2122
<http://pacific.fws.gov>

News Release



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Contact: Ken Goddard, 541-482-4191
Joan Jewett, 503-231-6211

Wildlife Forensics Lab Expands

New addition, to be dedicated August 16, includes bio-hazard containment facility

Since 1988, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Clark R. Bavin National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon, has helped solve wildlife crimes around the world, resulting in convictions of caviar and ivory smugglers, poachers of rare animals and dealers of forbidden "medicinal cures." In the process, the lab's scientists have developed many of the advances in the field of wildlife forensics.

But there were things the lab couldn't do, such as accepting carcasses and animal parts from overseas and conducting toxicology work that involved handling hazardous materials including poisons, pesticides, blood pathogens and other substances that can carry diseases.

Now, thanks to a new \$15 million addition, that will change. The world's most comprehensive wildlife forensics lab will truly be able to serve the world.

The 17,000 square-foot addition includes a Biological Containment Area that meets Department of Agriculture requirements for containment of potentially bio-hazardous materials entering the United States; an expanded state-of-the-art genetics lab; a modern necropsy unit; new offices and meeting rooms; and an odor-free "bug room," where the lab's domestic beetle collection chews meat off bones so scientists have pristine skeletons to analyze.

"The expansion will really enhance our ability to engage with the national and international wildlife forensics communities," said Ken Goddard, director of the lab, which is named after a longtime director of the Service's Law Enforcement Program. "We simply didn't have the proper facility where we could keep diseases contained so we had to refuse some cases."

The addition will be dedicated on August 16, and the lab and new facilities will be open for public tours sometime in the spring.

“The forensics lab is essential to our work in enforcing wildlife laws and protecting resources in this country and around the world,” said Service Director H. Dale Hall. “The lab helps our special agents and wildlife inspectors develop the evidence they need to bring charges and obtain convictions.”

Besides aiding the work of Service law enforcement officers, the lab, with a staff of 35 and a 2007 budget of \$3.5 million, provides forensic support to all 50 state fish and wildlife agencies. By treaty, it is the official crime lab of the 172 signatory countries of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the Wildlife Subgroup of Interpol.

With global illegal trade in wildlife and related products estimated at billions of dollars each year, the lab has no shortage of work.

DNA analysis done by the lab’s scientists led to the conviction of U.S. Caviar and Caviar, Ltd., in 2001, resulting in a \$10.4 million fine – the most ever in a wildlife trafficking case. In 2000, work done at the lab led to convictions for the illegal sale of smuggled shahtoosh shawls made from the highly endangered Tibetan antelope. More recently, genetics work by lab scientists led to the 2006 conviction of a Portland, Oregon, man who admitted selling shavings from the horn of a black rhinoceros, one of Africa’s most endangered species.

Authorities in Israel want the lab to help them find out who has been killing wild gazelles but Goddard said they had to decline because of the lack of a containment lab. The new Bio-Hazard III facility will change that.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 97-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 548 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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