



NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**SOUTHEAST RESIDENT SENTENCED TO THREE YEARS IN FEDERAL PRISON
FOR ILLEGALLY KILLING AND SELLING MARINE MAMMALS**

Anchorage, Alaska – United States Attorney Karen L. Loeffler announced that on March 9, 2009, Christopher R. Rowland, a resident of Craig, Alaska, was sentenced to 37 months in prison and fined \$5,000 in federal court in Anchorage for his conviction of four counts of violating the Lacey Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Following completion of his sentence of imprisonment, Rowland will be on supervised release for three years. Rowland pled guilty to the four counts on December 22, 2008.

Rowland, age 41, was sentenced by Chief United States District Court Judge John W. Sedwick.

In connection with the sentencing, the United States Attorney's office advised the court that Rowland was extensively engaged in the illegal hunting, killing, and export of sea otters, sea lions and harbor seals and the illegal sale of their pelts. As explained to the court, the investigation started as a response to a concerned citizen's tip which led to a two-year undercover operation into the illegal commercialization of sea otters, seals, and sea lions, all of which are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act. During the undercover operation, agents documented Rowland's illegal take of sea otters, the illegal sale of their pelts, and the failure to record and report harvest data as required by the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

The undercover operation revealed Rowland violated the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act, the Lacey Act and the Endangered Species Act by conducting frequent and well-planned hunting trips to harvest sea otters and sell their pelts on a commercial scale and without regard to the consequences of his illegal taking. During the course of the undercover operation conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mr. Rowland informed agents that he researched the regulations and laws governing sea otters by anonymously contacting various government agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for information on marine mammal rules and regulations. Thus armed with regulatory and legal information, Mr. Rowland gained a clear understanding on how best to conceal his crimes and put that understanding into practice. Mr. Rowland also took the additional steps to maximize his hunting time at sea by studying biologist and other population distribution studies of sea otter populations in Southeast Alaska. From these habitat and population studies, Mr. Rowland learned of the best sea otter rafting and congregation areas where the mammals would present a larger concentration of targets.

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In the course of this investigation the USFWS documented the illegal take of approximately 75 sea otters, and the illegal sale of 6 sea otter pelts and several skulls. Two of the illegal takes were spring born pups, described by the defendant as “micro-babies.” Statements made by the defendant to undercover officers indicated the defendant was only just getting started and had plans to market 40-50 hides per month to a broker in Korea. Those sales would also have been illegal under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Lacey Act.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service led the investigation that led to the prosecution of Mr. Rowland. That investigation and today’s prosecution benefitted significantly from the support of Alaska Wildlife Troopers, NOAA Fisheries’ Office of Law Enforcement, U. S. Forest Service, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Marshals Service, the State of Alaska Attorney General’s Office, the Alaska Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Enforcement, and the U. S. Attorney’s Office.

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