



NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**CRAIG RESIDENT PLEADS GUILTY TO TWO FELONY CHARGES
INVOLVING ILLEGAL TAKE AND SALE OF SEA OTTERS**

Anchorage, Alaska – United States Attorney Karen L. Loeffler announced that on November 17, 2009, Douglas Linn Smith, a resident of Craig, Alaska, pled guilty in federal court to one count of conspiracy to knowingly sell marine mammal parts and one count of knowingly attempting to sell wildlife with a market value in excess of \$350, both in violation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

Mr. Smith, age 31, pled guilty before United States District Court Judge John W. Sedwick.

In connection with the guilty plea, Assistant United States Attorney Steven Skrocki advised the court that Mr. Smith admitted that he was involved in a conspiracy to illegally take, transport, sell, and attempt to sell sea otter hides (*enhydra lutris*) on the open market, knowing that the hides had been taken, possessed and transported in violation of law. Smith also admitted that he offered to sell the hides of sea otters for \$750.00 each, knowing the hides had been taken, possessed and transported in a manner unlawful under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

The investigation in Southeast Alaska began as a response to a concerned citizen's tip that 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 the 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 suspected violations of the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act, the Lacey Act, and the Endangered Species Act. The investigation is ongoing.

Judge Sedwick scheduled sentencing for Mr. Smith on February 16, 2010. The law provides for a total sentence of five years in prison, a fine of \$250,000, and three years of supervised release. Under the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, the actual sentence imposed is based upon the seriousness of the offenses and the criminal history, if any, of the defendant. The plea agreement filed with the court has no agreement on the sentence to be imposed by the court and leaves that decision to the court after arguments by the parties are heard.

Ms. Loeffler commended the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 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, and the Alaska Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Enforcement for their involvement in this case.

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