

In the Spotlight:
Special Agents Honored by Justice Department

Special Agents **James Hampton, Roy Brown, Kevin Ellis,** and **Thomas Chisdock** of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) have been recognized by the Department of Justice's Environmental and Natural Resources Division for their work in bringing criminals to justice under the Nation's wildlife protection laws. The four were among those honored with Awards for Excellence at a Washington, D.C. ceremony on October 26, 2010, presided over by Assistant Attorney General Ignacia S. Moreno.

- Special Agent **James Hampton**, who now serves as OLE's resident-agent-in-charge in Houston, Texas, was recognized for his success in documenting the smuggling of leopard hides and skulls from animals unlawfully hunted in South Africa. As a field agent stationed in Denver at the time of this investigation, Hampton linked two South African guides, five U.S. hunters, and a U.S. taxidermist to a conspiracy in which illegally taken leopards were smuggled from South Africa to Zimbabwe and then on to the United States under the cover of fraudulent CITES permits.

The Justice Department award specifically lauded Hampton's role in helping Federal prosecutors secure the conviction of a defendant (a big game hunter from South Dakota) who stood trial on felony smuggling and wildlife charges before Federal juries in U.S. District Courts twice in this case (the first trial ended without a verdict because of the misconduct of a juror). Seven other individuals, including the two South Africa guides, pleaded guilty to Federal charges. One guide served an 18-month prison sentence; the other individuals prosecuted collectively paid \$65,000 in criminal fines and \$20,000 restitution to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

- Special Agents **Roy Brown** and **Kevin Ellis** were honored for investigative work that lead to the successful prosecution of Exxon Mobile Corporation – the world's largest publicly traded oil and gas company – for violating the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) at drilling and production facilities in five western States. Brown conducts investigations for the Service based out of Lander, Wyoming; Ellis is presently a deputy resident-agent-in-charge for OLE in Grand Junction, Colorado.

Charges in this case stemmed from a Service investigation that linked the company to the deaths of at least 85 protected birds (including waterfowl, shorebirds, passerines, and raptors) in Colorado, Wyoming, Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas. Most of the birds died after being exposed to hydrocarbons in uncovered natural gas well reserve pits and wastewater storage facilities. Under a plea agreement, Exxon Mobil pleaded guilty to five MBTA counts and agreed to pay \$400,000 in fines; make a \$200,000 community service payment for use in waterfowl rehabilitation and habitat preservation efforts; and implement an environmental compliance plan during its

three-year probationary period. Fine monies in this case were deposited in the Service-administered North American Wetlands Conservation Fund.

- Special Agent **Thomas Chisdock** received an Award of Excellence for his work on Operation Botanical – an undercover investigation that exposed illegal harvest and interstate sale of ginseng (a valuable medicinal plant) in the southern Appalachians. Chisdock, who is stationed in Asheville, North Carolina, also documented the unlawful take of black bears, interstate trafficking in bear parts, and drug and firearms violations over the course of this multi-year, multi-defendant case. Harvest of wild ginseng is regulated on a State-basis to ensure sustainable use, collection is not allowed on certain lands, and international trade of American ginseng requires an export permit under the CITES treaty.

This Service investigation secured charges against 40 individuals in seven states and two countries for more than 125 felony and 75 misdemeanor violations. Under sentences handed down to date, defendants were ordered to serve 218 months incarceration (more than 18 years), spend 319 months on probation, and perform 114 months of community service. These individuals also paid \$95,000 in fines and forfeited over 450 pounds of ginseng valued at more than \$200,000. Five defendants are currently negotiating a settlement