



## **News Release**

Pacific Southwest Regional Office  
2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-2606  
Sacramento, California 25825  
Telephone: 916-414-6464 Fax: 916-414-6486

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**Contact: USFWS: Erin Dean 310-328-1516**

### **US Fish and Wildlife Service Seeks Public's Assistance in Apprehending Fugitive Who Allegedly Sold Piranhas and Other Protected Species**

*LOS ANGELES*-- Special agents of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are seeking the public's assistance in locating a San Fernando Valley man who is a fugitive after failing to appear in federal court after being charged with multiple offenses involving the smuggling and trafficking of protected wildlife species, including piranhas.

Isaac Zimmerman, 61, of West Hills, failed to appear for a scheduled court hearing on July 12, at which time a federal judge issued a warrant for his arrest. Fish and Wildlife agents have since learned that Zimmerman may have fled the area as early as June 21. The agents believe that Zimmerman will attempt to leave the United States, if he has not done so already.

Zimmerman; his Hawthorne-based company, River Wonders; and his wife were indicted by a federal grand jury in Los Angeles in August 2009. In May 2010, the three defendants were named in a 13-count superseding indictment that specifically accuses Zimmerman of conspiracy, illegal fish trafficking, smuggling fish into the United States, falsifying documents, obstructing an investigation by the Fish and Wildlife Service, making false statements to the Fish and Wildlife Service, smuggling fish out of the United States, and smuggling fish out of the United States while free on bond in this case. Most of the 13 felony counts in the indictment carry statutory maximum sentences of five years in federal prison.

The indictment alleges that Zimmerman illegally imported and sold live piranha and fresh water stingrays. It is illegal to possess or sell live piranhas and fresh water stingrays in California and across most of the southern United States. Both are considered invasive species that could become established and pose a threat to humans and to native species if intentionally or accidentally released into the temperate waters of states with warm climates. The indictment also alleges that he illegally imported and exported arapaima (*Arapaima gigas*), a fish protected by the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

In addition to River Wonders, Zimmerman owns Da Tien Pets in Gardena, California. He uses both companies to sell, import and export live fish and some reptiles for the pet trade.

Zimmerman's wife, Leonore Catalina Zimmerman, pleaded guilty in June to illegal fish trafficking and is scheduled to be sentenced in United States District Court on September 20.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is offering a reward to anyone who provides information leading to Zimmerman's arrest. Anyone with information regarding his whereabouts is encouraged to contact the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Office of Law Enforcement in Los Angeles at 310-678-4901 and ask to speak to the duty agent.

(Note to Editors: Photos of Mr. Zimmerman, piranhas are available upon request.)