



## U.S. Department of Justice

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### **NEWS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **Idaho Aquarium Operator Faces Possible Bond Revocation**

### *Nephew arrested for Obstruction of Justice*

BOISE – Ammon Covino, 39, of Meridian, Idaho, was arrested yesterday for violating the conditions of his pretrial release on a Florida indictment charging violations of the Lacey Act, U.S. Attorney Wendy J. Olson announced. Federal prosecutors earlier filed a motion to revoke Covino's bond. According to the motion, investigators learned that Covino directed his nephew, Pete Covino IV, to contact an individual in Florida and destroy certain information relating to a recent order Covino placed for undersized and illegal nurse sharks. Pete Covino IV, 20, of Star, Idaho, also was arrested and charged with obstruction of justice based on a complaint filed in the Southern District of Florida. Both men appeared in Boise federal court this morning. Ammon Covino is due back in court on Friday, March 1, to determine if he should be detained pending transfer to the Southern District of Florida. Peter Covino IV is scheduled to appear in Florida federal court on March 15.

Ammon Covino was first arrested February 21 on a November 8, 2012, Southern District of Florida indictment charging him and Christopher Conk with conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act and violating the Lacey Act by purchasing Florida protected marine life in interstate commerce. The four count indictment alleges that Covino and Conk purchased four spotted eagle rays (*Aeobatus narinari*) and two lemon sharks (*Negaprion brevirostris*) for approximately \$6,300. The marine wildlife were allegedly harvested illegally and without a permit.

At his initial appearance on February 21, Covino was released on a \$100,000 bond. Chief U.S. Magistrate Judge Candy W. Dale ordered Covino not to commit any new federal, state or local crimes as one of the conditions of his release. If Judge Dale determines that

Covino did violate the conditions of his pretrial release or committed a new crime, she may revoke his bond.

Ammon Covino and Christopher Conk are each charged with one count of Conspiracy and three counts of Illegal Purchase and Sale of Fish/Wildlife. Each count is punishable by up to five years in prison, a maximum fine of \$250,000, and three years of supervised release. The indictment also includes a forfeiture count. Pete Covino, IV, is charged with one count of obstruction of justice. That charge is punishable by up to twenty years in prison, a maximum fine of \$250,000 and three years of supervised release.

The case is being investigated by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFW), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

In the federal criminal justice system, indictments and complaints are only allegations of criminal conduct and are not evidence of guilt. A person is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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