



NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**THREE SENTENCED FOR CONSPIRING TO PROVIDE ILLEGAL BIG GAME HUNTS IN
WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE**

Anchorage, Alaska – U.S. Attorney Bryan Schroder announced that Casey Richardson, 48, of Huson, Montana, Jeffrey Harris, 45, of Bainbridge Island, Washington, and Dale Lackner, 74, of Haines, Alaska, were sentenced Friday, Jan. 18, 2019, in federal court to five years of probation for violations of the Lacey Act and other federal laws.

As part of their sentence, Richardson was also ordered to pay \$14,000 in restitution, Harris was ordered to pay \$26,000 in restitution, and Lackner was ordered to pay \$6,000 in restitution. Restitution was to be made to the Department of Interior Restoration Fund on behalf of the National Park Service, and to the State of Alaska. The defendants are prohibited from any hunting or to assist in any hunting for the five years of probation. They were each ordered to perform over 100 hours of community service, and assist in providing and paying for public service announcements which would include a statement about the importance of understanding and following hunting laws and regulations. In addition, Richardson and Harris were each sentenced to serve three months in a halfway house followed by three months of home confinement, and Lackner was sentenced to six months of home confinement. During the periods of home confinement, the defendants will be on electronic monitoring.

The three men previously pleaded guilty to several violations of the Lacey Act and other federal laws. Richardson pleaded guilty to one count of misdemeanor Conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act and two counts felony Conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act. Harris pleaded guilty to one count felony Conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act, one count felony Lacey Act False Record, one count False Statements, and one count Conspiracy to Use Substance to Incapacitate Game. Lackner pleaded guilty to one count misdemeanor Conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act and one count Lacey Act False Record.

According to court documents, a federal investigation was launched in December 2015 after an anonymous letter was received by the State of Alaska Wildlife Troopers, Wildlife Investigations Unit. The letter indicated illegal hunting activities were occurring at Ptarmigan Lake Lodge (PLL), which is located within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, Alaska. PLL is owned by Urban Raho and was permitted to operate as a concessionaire within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve to provide sport hunting guide services. Richardson and Harris are not Alaska residents nor registered guides. Lackner is an Alaska resident and was a registered guide beginning in 2015.

During the 2014 and 2015 hunting seasons, out-of-state hunters illegally hunted and killed Dall Sheep at PLL without being accompanied by a registered guide. In 2014, Harris guided an out-of-state hunter at PLL, with the hunter harvesting a Dall Sheep. Harris falsified the hunt record indicating the hunt was conducted by a registered guide. In 2014, at PLL, Harris harvested two brown bears without a guide present and without possessing a harvest ticket or locking tag for either bear. One of the brown bears was harvested out of season and the hunt record was falsified. Also in 2014, Richardson conspired with Lackner to harvest a Dall Sheep at PLL. Lackner falsified the State of Alaska Sheep Harvest Report indicating he harvested the sheep and later transported the sheep to Montana, to Richardson.

In 2015, Richardson guided three out-of-state hunters, on three separate hunts at PLL. All three hunters harvested Dall Sheep. Harris falsified two of the hunt records indicating the hunts were conducted by registered guides. Lackner falsified the third hunt record indicating that hunt was conducted by a registered guide.

In 2014 and 2015, multiple illegal bait site locations were determined to be maintained by PLL and not registered with the State of Alaska. Xylitol, an artificial sweetener which is toxic to canines and birds, was used at the unlawful bait sites to poison wolves and bears.

On July 5, 2016, the National Park Service suspended Urban Rahoi's concession contract pending the outcome of the criminal investigation and directed Urban Rahoi to refund all hunt clients that may have been booked for 2016 and 2017 hunt seasons. Urban Rahoi was issued a Federal Violation Notice for an unregistered bait site, surrendered his State of Alaska guide/outfitter license, and made a donation to the National Park Foundation. Justin Field, of Team Fate Outdoors, was issued a Federal Violation Notice for unlawful commercial filming, without a permit, of a 2015 Dall Sheep hunt.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, the State of Alaska Wildlife Troopers, and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks conducted the investigation. This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Retta Randall.

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