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Black rhinoceros horns

Photo by USFWS

Thanks to the Service's Operation Crash, Additional Rhinoceros Horn Traffickers are Sentenced and Fined

Robert Wesley Newman, 46, of Benton, Tennessee, was sentenced on Tuesday, November 8, 2016 in U.S. District Court in St. Louis, Missouri, to knowingly engaging in conduct that involved the interstate sale and purchase of four black rhinoceros horns in violation of the

Endangered Species Act. He received two-years of probation, 40 hours of community service, and must pay a \$170,000 Community Service Payment to the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation that will be directed to rhinoceros conservation programs.

On February 17, 2012, the subject knowingly and illegally sold four black rhino horns and two horns from a southern white rhino to a buyer from Missouri. The two pairs of black rhino horns, weighing 16.3 pounds, had a market value of over \$400,000. At the direction of the Missouri buyer, Newman met along an interstate in Illinois where the subject was handed a brown paper sack that contained \$180,000 in cash in exchange for the six horns. The horns were then transported back to Missouri where they were seized by agents the next day during a nationwide “take-down” – part of a long-term investigation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service known as Operation Crash.

A second, and separate, case resulted in a Canadian man and his business, “888 Auctions, Inc.” pleading guilty to the unlawful export of elephant ivory and python skin. Each were fined \$5,000, a victim surcharge of \$2,500 (for a total fine of \$12,500), and received two years of probation. In September 2015, charges were filed in Ontario, Canada for the unlawful export of a whole elephant ivory tusk, unlawful export of a carving made from elephant ivory, and unlawful export of a sword sheath made from the skin of a python. These charges were made in violation of subsections 6(2) and 22(1) of the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act. This case was jointly investigated by Service SAs and Environment and Climate Change Canada, Wildlife Enforcement, Major Case Unit and was adjudicated in Newmarket, Ontario, Canada.

Rhinoceros horn is a highly valued and sought after commodity despite the fact that international trade in it has been largely banned or otherwise highly regulated since 1976. Libation cups and ornamental carvings are particularly sought after in China and other Asian countries. The escalating value of these items has heightened demand for the horn and fostered a thriving black market, including modern carvings being sold as antiques. Most species of rhinoceros are extinct or on the brink of extinction as a result of this thriving black market.

The award winning Operation Crash is a continuing investigation led by the Special Investigations Unit of the Department of Interior’s Fish and Wildlife Service. Operation Crash is an ongoing effort by the special agents to detect, deter, and refer for prosecution those engaged in the illegal trafficking of rhinoceros horn. In addition to putting wildlife traffickers behind bars, \$7.6 million in fines and restitution have been collected by the courts to date. Congratulations, once again, to the Office of Law Enforcement for the outstanding investigative work and one more wildlife trafficker has had their day in court.