

# Operation Broken Glass

Current as of April 11, 2019

Operation Broken Glass was a criminal investigation led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement, which focused on the most prolific dealers and fisherman of illegal juvenile American eels known as “elvers.” It was initiated in response to wide-scale poaching on the eastern seaboard and the subsequent unlawful elver export from the United States to East Asia. It was cooperatively worked with 16 state and federal partners. The undercover operations for this investigation are complete and the case is currently in the prosecution phase. All of the defendants were charged with violations of the Lacey Act and are responsible for over \$7 million in illegal elver sales.

## Demand for American Elvers

- **United States Eel Fishery**
  - Harvest is only legal in Maine and South Carolina.
  - In Maine, from March to May, fishing is open statewide to state licensed fisherman and dealers. It is a major source of state revenue (\$40 million) and second only to lobster fishery. The 2018 catch limit was 9,688 pounds and set by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.
  - In South Carolina, fishing is allowed in all waters except the North Santee River.
  - In 2009, the average price per pound of American elvers in Maine was \$100 compared to the average price per pound in 2018, which was \$2,400.
  - In 2019, the legal market price reached \$3,000 per pound.
- **International Eel Fishery**
  - Overfishing and increased demand for native Japanese eels in Asia led to the fishing of European eels. In 2007, European eels were afforded CITES Appendix-II protection.
  - In 2010, the overfishing and increased demand for European eels caused the European Union to ban exports of European eel, which led to worldwide interest and increased fishing for American eels.
  - Unsustainable increases in demand for juvenile American eels led to the international wildlife trafficking investigation known as Operation Broken Glass.

## East Coast Search Warrants

- From 2011-2014, the Service led an undercover investigation involving the support and assistance of law enforcement officers from 12 states and several federal agencies.
- On April 30 and May 1, 2014, the OLE, with over 150 law enforcement officers from partner agencies, executed 20 search warrants in seven states.
- Undercover operations and search warrants led to multiple indictments and convictions of more than 20 individuals who were responsible for the large scale poaching and illegal commercialization of the American eel.

## **Types of Investigations**

- Unlawful overharvest of American elvers in states with open eel fishing seasons.
- Unlawful poaching of American elvers in states with no eel fishing season.
- Unlawful transport of American elvers in interstate commerce.
- Clandestine false labeling and smuggling of American elver export shipments.
- International commercial wildlife trafficking of American elvers.

## **Sentences/Fines/Forfeiture/Restitution**

- Total prison sentences to date: 5.5 years.
- Total probation to date: 40 years.
- Total fines to date: \$92,500.
- Total forfeiture and restitution to date: \$265,000.

## **Sentencing Summary**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Sentencing Date</b>
Michael Bryant	May 17, 2017
Yarann Im	December 14, 2017
Thomas Choi	December 14, 2017
Scott Willey	December 14, 2017
Harry Wertan	July 10, 2017
Mark Weihe	July 10, 2017
Jay James	July 10, 2017
Tommy Zhou	November 3, 2017
Richard Austin	October 25, 2017
John Pinkham	February 1, 2018
Michael Squillace	February 1, 2018
Robert Bowdoin	February 14, 2018
Charles Good	April 19, 2018
Mark Green	April 19, 2018
George Anestis	April 19, 2018
William Sheldon	May 3, 2018
Timothy Lewis	May 3, 2018
Thomas Reno	May 3, 2018
Al Cray	June 14, 2018

## **Prosecutorial Partners**

- U.S. Department of Justice's Environmental and Natural Resources Division
- U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Maine
- U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts
- U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Rhode Island
- U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of New Jersey
- U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Delaware
- U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Maryland
- U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of South Carolina