

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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ALLIGATOR SHIPMENTS UNCOVERED BY FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE SPECIAL AGENTS

Six persons have been arrested and more than 500 American alligator hides seized in one of the biggest cases involving the shipment of alligator hides ever uncovered in the United States, Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

The seizures and arrests, carried out by Special Agents of the Fish and Wildlife Service pursuant to search and arrest warrants, took place on September 17 at the Adams Tanning Corporation in Newark, New Jersey. A month ago, a similar operation in New Orleans resulted in criminal charges being filed against three other men and the seizure of approximately 260 alligator hides.

The two investigations are part of a continuing crackdown on illegal traffic in endangered wildlife. The American alligator is protected by the Endangered Species Act of 1973, which prohibits the interstate transportation or sale of endangered animals. The Lacey Act also prohibits the interstate transportation of illegally taken wildlife.

Arrested at the tannery in New Jersey were Jacques Klapisch, a hide broker, and his two sons, all of Leonia, New Jersey; John T. Kelly and his wife, Barbara, of Breezy Point, New York; and Martin Dara of Brooklyn, New York. They were brought before U.S. Magistrate Harry Lane, Jr. of Newark on charges of violating the Endangered Species Act. The Endangered Species Act carries a maximum penalty of one year in jail and a \$20,000 fine for each violation.

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The hides seized in the Newark case had been transported to New Jersey from New Orleans. Averaging five feet in length, the skins are estimated by Special Agents to have a value exceeding \$45,000, or \$17 a foot. Also seized in the operation were two vehicles used to transport the hides, and filing cabinets full of records.

The arrests last month in New Orleans, the result of a lengthy investigation by Fish and Wildlife Service agents, took place at a warehouse on August 18. They were assisted by the U.S. Marshals; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents of the Treasury Department; and officers of the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission.

The shipment seized in New Orleans was valued at over \$15,000, or \$12 a foot. Agents also seized a 40-foot refrigerated tractor-trailer, that had been used to ship the hides from North Carolina to New Orleans, and another vehicle also used in transporting the skins.

The two principals in the New Orleans case, Daniel W. Small, Jr. and Robert Pruitt, both of North Carolina, are charged with a total of 18 counts each for violations of the Endangered Species Act and the Lacey Act. Both men are liable for a \$300,000 fine and 18 years in prison.

In recent years, increasing public interest in the environment has caused a greater demand for "natural" things, including wearing apparel, jewelry and curios made from endangered or illegally taken wildlife.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has intensified its efforts to halt the illicit commercialization of the Nation's wildlife. In the last three years, combined law enforcement efforts by the Service and sister agents in the Southeastern States have reduced illegal traffic in alligators.