

MULE DEER POACHERS FINED OVER \$11,000, LOSE HUNTING AND FIREARMS PRIVILEGES



A father and son from Gillette have been sentenced to more than \$11,000 in fines and have had hunting and fishing privileges suspended as a result of the poaching of a trophy mule deer near Gillette.

Chase Winford, 21, paid \$5,560 in fines and \$2,000 in restitution and had his hunting and fishing privileges suspended for four years as a result of his illegal take of a trophy buck mule deer without a license, shooting from a vehicle, and trespassing on private property without permission. The sentence was pronounced by Campbell County Circuit Court Judge Terrill Tharp. In addition, Winford's hunting privileges were suspended for four years, and his fishing privileges were suspended for two years, making him ineligible to purchase hunting licenses until Sept. 4, 2013 in Wyoming and 31 other states. He was also charged with interference with a peace officer, but the charge was later dismissed by the prosecution during a plea agreement.

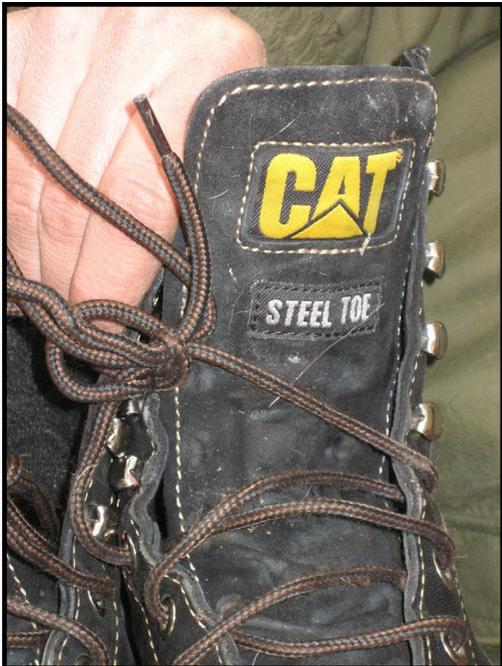
Robert Winford, father of Chase Winford, was also charged and sentenced to pay \$3,620 in fines and restitution and forfeited two rifles for taking part in the crime. Robert Winford also lost hunting and fishing privileges for two years and cannot carry a firearm in the field during his

suspension.

The case started in the fall of 2008 when Gillette Game Warden Travis Crane observed a trophy mule deer near the highway. Crane sat and watched the deer that evening thinking it might be all too tempting for someone to shoot, given its location. Warden Crane happened to be in the right place at the right time and at dusk witnessed shots being fired from a small vehicle in the direction of the deer. The vehicle immediately left and Crane investigated the scene and saw that the buck deer had been shot and left.

Crane then waited to see if the individuals might return to get the deer. After about three hours his patience paid off when the vehicle returned and

stopped at the location where the trophy deer was shot. Crane stopped the car, finding just one person by the name of David Martinez, from Texas, inside the vehicle. Martinez initially advised he alone had killed the deer and was taken to the Campbell County Detention Center. Further investigation revealed a much different story. Martinez had lied to protect the Winfords, who were allowing Martinez to stay at their apartment in Gillette.



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Crane contacted Newcastle Game Warden Dustin Shorma to assist in the investigation and things became more complicated after they returned to the location to process the crime scene. The wardens found the deer had been moved a short distance and butchered. The head and cape were gone, along with the best parts of meat, leaving the carcass and some edible portions behind. Further investigation led to two separate search warrants and assistance from WGFD Wildlife Investigator Scott Adell and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Special Agent Vance Jurgens, from South Dakota.

The officers were led on several false trips around Gillette to locate evidence. Ultimately, evidence was seized from residences in Rapid City, SD and dumpsters outside of the Gillette residence. Following the collection of evidence with the defendants refusing to speak to the investigators, items were sent to the WGFD Crime Laboratory in Laramie.

Just prior to the first search warrant, Chase Winford and his wife left their residence at approximately 3:30 a.m. with the buck deer rack and meat from the deer. Winford said he threw the meat and the deer rack from the window of his vehicle along I-90 at 70 miles per hour to get rid of the evidence. Robert Winford and Chase Winford later located one half of the deer rack and a cooler of meat from the deer and turned it in to WGFD officials. The Game and Fish lab compared the DNA collected from the poached deer at the scene with the meat turned in by the Winfords to see if it matched. Some of the meat did match, but the laboratory concluded the cooler contained meat from nine different mule deer and white-tailed deer.

The Winfords were charged with shooting from a vehicle, trespassing, wanton destruction of a big game animal and interference with a police officer.

“This case goes to show how vulnerable our trophy mule deer are,” said Travis Crane, currently the game warden in Kaycee. “I observed this buck late at night on one other occasion and the second time I saw him, I watched poachers shoot and kill him. This mule deer would have made an exceptional trophy for a legal hunter. Instead, the rack was busted into pieces and discarded along the highway as these poachers tried to hide evidence.”

