

OPERATION 10 – SLEEP: Wyoming’s Biggest Wildlife Case

This case centered around the Carter family, ranchers and outfitters in the Ten Sleep/Washakie County area of Wyoming. The Carter family owns several thousand acres, which provide access to large amounts of adjacent public lands. The area in which the Carters ranch and outfit is known for its trophy elk hunting. The odds for a nonresident to draw an “any elk” license are very low, which is the basis for why this case developed. During the course of the suspected illegal activity, the Carter family split up the ranch, allowing them to secure as many as 8, “any elk” landowner licenses (landowners are issued up to two elk licenses if they qualify based on acreage and elk use). These landowner licenses cannot be sold or transferred. Members of the Carter family sold elk hunts to wealthy clients from all over the country for approximately \$7,500 and “covered up” any illegally harvested elk by tagging them with their resident landowner licenses.

The case broke open when two of the “regulars” could not make their annual hunting trip in 2009, so the Carters offered the trip to two unsuspecting Oregon hunters. These two Oregon hunters assumed it was a legal hunt. When the first elk was killed, the Carters revealed the illegal details to the hunters. The two hunters did not take a second elk and, upon returning to Oregon, informed a local Oregon wildlife officer of the illegal activity. The wildlife officer then contacted the Wyoming Game and Fish Department Wildlife Investigations Unit.



Unsuspecting Oregon Hunter

The case, which lasted over 2 1/2 years, was jointly investigated by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department’s Wildlife Investigations Unit with assistance from several Wyoming game wardens, federal agents from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and wildlife officers with the Oregon State Patrol. The case, involving violations of both federal and state wildlife laws, was prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney’s Office and the Washakie County Attorney’s Office and involved suspects from Wyoming, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, Tennessee, Florida, California, North Dakota, Montana, Wisconsin, Colorado and Texas.

During the “take-down” phase, over 60 state and federal wildlife officers from Wyoming and several other states, served 4 search warrants and interviewed over 65 suspects and witnesses. An operational command center was set up in Wyoming to coordinate and handle the large volume of information and evidence collected.

To date, over \$300,000 in fines and restitution has been collected – the most ever for any wildlife case in Wyoming. A total of 36 years of hunting privileges were suspended for those individuals convicted in the case. The investigation documented at least 17 illegally killed big game animals, most being trophy class bull elk. The Department’s Investigative Unit invested over 3,500 man-hours investigating this case, pouring over records, identifying suspects, gathering evidence, filing charges and testifying in court.

The Carter family members and several hunters from Oregon and other states pleaded guilty to felony convictions for illegal trafficking in wildlife in U.S. District Court on March 21, 2012. The hunters were charged with unlawfully hunting trophy class elk on the Carter Ranch between 2003 and 2009. The ranch owners, Richard Carter Sr., RC Carter, and Mark Carter also pleaded guilty to felony conspiracy to traffic in illegal wildlife. Richard Carter was convicted of conspiracy to traffic in illegal wildlife. His sons, RC and Mark Carter, pleaded guilty to felonies involving trafficking in illegal wildlife and falsifying wildlife records.



RC Carter

Richard Carter Sr.

Mark Carter

Mathew S. Robinson of Bend, Oregon, was found guilty of 2 felony charges of trafficking in illegal wildlife. Robinson was charged federally and after a 6 day jury trial, was found guilty of conspiring to traffic in illegal wildlife, trafficking in illegal wildlife and aiding and abetting. Robinson was accused of conspiring to illegally hunt elk in Wyoming between 2005 and 2008, assisting others in hunting elk, and of illegally killing a bull elk in 2008 without a proper license. Robinson's father, James S. Robinson of West Linn, Oregon, pleaded guilty to a felony on March 4, 2011 for trafficking in illegal wildlife. James Robinson was accused of killing a 7x8 bull elk without a proper license in 2005. He was ordered to pay restitution of \$15,000 for the elk, a \$20,000 fine, and ordered to complete community service as part of a probationary sentence.



James and Matthew Robinson



James Robinson

Another hunter, Steve Ned Farah of West Linn, Oregon pleaded guilty on March 21, 2012 to 2 felonies involving conspiracy and trafficking in illegal wildlife. Farah was accused of unlawfully killing a 6x6 bull elk in 2007 and another in 2008. Four other Oregon hunters were charged with federal misdemeanor offenses involving the unlawful taking and transportation of wildlife. Jon R. Gleason of Custer, Washington previously pleaded guilty to unlawfully killing a 6x6 bull elk in 2006 and was ordered to pay \$7,500 in restitution, a \$1,000 fine and is further prohibited from

hunting for 2 years. Joseph Karas of Portland, Oregon, pleaded guilty to unlawfully killing a 6x6 elk in 2006. Karas was ordered to pay \$7,500 in restitution, perform community service, and is prohibited from hunting for two years. John Woodmark of Depoe Bay, Oregon pleaded guilty to unlawfully killing a 6x7 bull elk in 2007 and was ordered to pay \$7,500 in restitution, perform community service, and is prohibited from hunting for 2 years. James Dovenberg of West Linn, Oregon, pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting another in the killing of a 6x6 bull elk in 2006 without a proper license. Dovenberg was ordered to pay a fine of \$12,000 and is prohibited from hunting for 2 years.



Steve Farah



John Woodmark

Several other hunters were prosecuted in Washakie County Circuit Court in relation to the case. Gerald Jay Robinson of Wilsonville, Oregon pleaded guilty to taking an antlerless elk in 2004 without a license. He was ordered to pay \$3,000 restitution and a \$750 fine. William Hayward Batts of Hyattville, Wyoming pled no contest to unlawfully transferring a hunting license and making a false statement on a Wyoming interstate game tag affidavit. He was fined \$370 for each of the 2 counts and had his Wyoming hunting privileges suspended for 3 years. Robert Till of Columbia, Tennessee pleaded guilty to taking an antelope in 2003 without a license and was ordered to pay \$3,000 restitution, a fine of \$750 and had his Wyoming hunting privileges suspended for 3 years. William Patrick Mercer of Arcadia, Florida also pleaded guilty to taking an antelope in 2003 without a license and was ordered to pay \$3,000 restitution and a fine of \$5,000.

Violations in connection with this case are still expected to be charged in state courts.



10-Sleep Evidence Room @ Casper, Wyoming