

A photograph of three hunters in a snowy forest, each holding a large animal trophy. The trophies appear to be large mammals, possibly moose or elk. The hunters are wearing winter gear, including hats and jackets. The background is a dense forest of evergreen trees covered in snow.

**NORTH DAKOTA, IDAHO
AND FEDERAL GAME WARDENS**

**TEAM
UP**

IAHO WARDENS

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Based on information from an anonymous call in January, 2012, Idaho Fish and Game Officer Greg Johnson started an investigation in Idaho dealing with illegally taken mountain lions. Three hunters from North Dakota; Eric Harmel, Dwayne Hellman and Richard Gustafson allegedly paid \$500 each to Todd Navarro; Navarro is not a licensed outfitter or guide. Navarro, a resident of Bonners Ferry, Idaho, with the assistance of his son Jacob Navarro and their friend Christopher Wilson, took the three ND hunters on guided mountain lion hunt with the use of his hounds.

From left to right; Dwayne Hellman, Richard Gustafson, and Eric Harmel with their poached Mt. Lion)

All three North Dakota hunters harvested one mountain lion each which were checked in at the Big R Store in Sandpoint, Idaho. The lions were tagged by Todd Navarro, Jacob Navarro and Christopher Wilson. Harmel, Hellman and Gustafson were instructed to tell the authorities, if checked, they purchased the mountain lions, not harvested them. Because the hunters were from North Dakota, Idaho Game Wardens Greg Johnson and Dave Overman contacted United States Fish and Wildlife Service Special Agent Rich Gamba from Washington State. Ultimately North Dakota Game Wardens Brent Schwan and Jim Burud were contacted to assist in the case because the North Dakota hunters lived in Williston, North Dakota. Also assisting in North Dakota were U.S Fish & Wildlife Services Special Agents Rich Grosz and Kevin Downs.

On February 13, 2012, in the multi-agency coordinated effort, Idaho Senior Conservation Officers Dave Overman and Dan Hislop drove the 750, winter travel, miles from Coeur d' Alene, Idaho to Williston, North Dakota.

On February 14, 2012, with Idaho Senior Conservation Officer Greg Johnson coordinating enforcement activities and contacts in Idaho, and North Dakota Warden Jim Burud coordinating activities in North Dakota; ND Game Wardens Schwan and Burud had previously obtained seven state search warrants which were granted by a North Dakota district court judge. These search warrants were served by ND Game Wardens Jim Burud and Brent Schwan, IDFG Senior Conservation Officers Dave Overman and Dan Hislop, and USFWS Special Agents Rich Grosz and Kevin Downs.

During the course of the investigation activities in North Dakota, Eric Harmel, Dwayne Hellman and Richard

Gustafson were located and interviewed; through the interviews it was determined the three North Dakota residents had driven to Bonners Ferry, ID and did not apply for the nonresident tags and hound hunters permits. When they met the night before the hunt, the three Idaho residents agreed they could, for a fee, use their mountain lion tags. All of the conspirators knew this was illegal in Idaho, and they knew if they transported the mountain lions across state lines it was a federal crime. Once the hunt was completed the North Dakota residents paid \$500.00 each of the Idaho hunters for the hunt. Three compound bows, mountain lion tags, and cell phones were seized from the ND hunters as evidence; North Dakota Game Warden Burud also seized the three mountain lion skulls and hides from a taxidermist in Williston, ND. All of the seized items were then transferred to USFWS Special Agent Rich Gamba the Spokane office of the U.S Fish and Wildlife



Convicted poacher Eric Harmel proud of his illegal Mt. Lion



North Dakota Game and Fish officers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service special agents from North Dakota and Spokane, Idaho Fish and Game officers, and the U.S. Attorney's Office in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho all worked together to complete this investigation.

Service by IDFG Officers Overman and Hislop upon their return to Coeur d' Alene, ID.

On August 22, 2012, Gustafson, Hellman, and Harmel were charged with a "Class A" misdemeanor for Lacey Act at the federal courthouse in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. All three plead guilty. Three compound bows and three mountain lion skulls and skins were forfeited. Each paid \$3,500 in fines, \$1,285.00 in restitution, \$25.00 assessment fee, 25 hours community service and one year hunting ban.

On May 8, 2014, Christopher Wilson and Jacob Navarro were sentenced. Wilson was charged with one count of Lacey Act violation "class a" misdemeanor for "aiding and abetting the

unlawful acquisition and transportation of three mountain lions". He was ordered to pay a \$500 fine and a \$25 special assessment fee. Additionally, Wilson was banned from hunting and fishing anywhere in the United States for a minimum of three years. The ban will extend to five years if the defendant does not earn his GED, attend hunter safety training, and serve 25 hours of community service.

Jacob Navarro was charged with one count of Lacey Act violation "class a" misdemeanor for "aiding and abetting the unlawful acquisition and transportation of three mountain lions". Navarro was ordered to pay a \$750 fine and a \$25 special assessment fee. Addi-

tionally, Navarro was banned from hunting and fishing anywhere in the United States for a minimum of three years. The ban will extend to five years if the defendant does not earn his GED, attend hunter safety training, and serve 50 hours of community service.

On October 15, 2014, Todd Navarro appeared before the Coeur d'Alene federal courthouse to be sentenced. Navarro plead guilty to one count of a Lacey Act "class a" misdemeanor. He was fined \$500.00 and a \$25.00 assessment fee in addition to a five year probation and a five year hunting ban. He is also required to complete fifty hours of community service and has to take a

wildlife management class or hunter education class.

North Dakota Game and Fish Officers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Special Agents from North Dakota and Spokane, Idaho Fish and Game Officers, and the U.S. Attorney's Office in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho all

worked together to complete this investigation. Without this collaborated effort between different state and federal agencies, these poachers may have never been apprehended and appropriately charged for their injustices to wildlife. Even though the officers involved wore uniforms of different color, the oath they've taken remains the same. ❧



Todd Navarro's truck, showing his support for game wardens

Written by North Dakota Game & Fish Game Warden Jim Burud