



NEWS RELEASE

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JUNEAU GUIDE SENTENCED TO JAIL, PAYS OVER \$70,000 IN FINES AND RESTITUTION

Anchorage, Alaska – United States Attorney Karen L. Loeffler announced today, March 24, 2009, that Juneau resident and guide Larry Hooton was sentenced to a term of three months imprisonment, fined \$41,000 and ordered to pay \$30,000 in restitution to the state of Alaska and the U.S. Forest Service for illegally guiding and taking brown bears on Admiralty Island National Monument in excess of his permit.

Chief U.S. District Court Judge John W. Sedwick imposed the sentence on Hooton, age 70.

Hooton, who owned and ran Seahook Charters, and his sons Shawn Hooton, age 42, and Shane Hooton, age 41, each plead guilty to conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act in January, 2009, for illegally taking brown bears during guided hunts on Admiralty Island, in the Tongass National Forest. In connection with the guilty pleas and the sentencing of Hooton, Assistant United States Attorney Steven E. Skrocki advised the court that the Hootons conspired to illegally guide non-resident hunters for brown bears on Admiralty Island National Monument in excess of their one hunt permit issued by the U.S. Forest Service. Seahook Charters exceeded their one permitted brown bear hunt limit by guiding three more hunters than the permit allowed and by taking four brown bears when only a single brown bear was allocated by their Forest Service permit. Charging documents and the plea agreements detailed the actions by Larry Hooton who, as justification for the excess kills, claimed that the additional bears were killed below mean high tide, when, in fact, the client hunters guided by the Hootons all utilized Admiralty Island lands to stalk and illegally kill the brown bears.

In addition to the sentence, Judge Sedwick ordered the defendants to forfeit equipment used in the offense, cease commercial guiding for brown bear, and imposed a no hunting restriction. For his role in the offense, Shawn Hooton pled guilty to conspiracy and was sentenced to three months home confinement, two years probation, and a fine of \$30,000. He was also ordered to forfeit equipment used in the offense, including a custom .460 Weatherby rifle and scope, and to cease any commercial guiding, and is further prohibited from hunting for the two year term of his probation. Shane Hooton pled guilty and was sentenced to one year of probation and fined \$20,000. He is also prohibited from guiding and hunting during the term of his probation and also forfeited a custom .460 Weatherby and scope.

This investigation and today's prosecution benefitted significantly from the efforts of the U. S. Forest Service Law Enforcement and Investigations, Alaska Wildlife Troopers Juneau Post, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement and the U. S. Attorney's Office. Special Agent in Charge, Stanley F. Pruzenski with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Alaska Region, complimented all of the

participating enforcement personnel on their cooperative efforts, adding, “Alaska is rich in its wildlife resources. We cannot allow this resource to be exploited illegally for commercial gain.”

U.S. Forest Service Assistant Special Agent in Charge Dennis Deason stated, “The successful resolution of this case is a testimony to the spirit of cooperation between the state and federal agencies charged with protecting our natural resources. It is proof that criminals who intend to profit from the illegal exploitation of our public lands and resources will be held accountable. Our agencies will continue to aggressively pursue criminal prosecution of those who would unlawfully exploit public resources for commercial gain.”

“The prosecution of Seahook Charters invalidates the below mean high water exception to brown bear guiding in Southeast Alaska”, said U.S. Attorney Karen L. Loeffler. “Seahook charters violated the terms of its Forest Service permit and for these violations, paid over \$120,000 in fines and restitution, lost valuable equipment and, in Larry Hooton’s circumstance, is serving time in federal prison.”

The United States Department of Agriculture, United States Forest Service, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service conducted the investigation that led to the prosecution of Seahook Charters.

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