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News Release

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Savage man sentenced for possessing firearms and explosives

MINNEAPOLIS – Earlier today in federal court in St. Paul, a 50-year-old Savage man was sentenced for possessing a machine gun and distributing explosives. United States District Court Judge Paul A. Magnuson sentenced Wesley Noah Banks to 151 months in prison on one count of illegal possession of a machine gun and one count of illegal distribution of explosive materials. Banks was charged on February 14, 2011, and pleaded guilty on March 24, 2011.

In his plea agreement, Banks admitted that on January 29, 2010, he received a model AR-15 machine gun. He also admitted that on June 7, 2010, he distributed two destructive devices to Bruce Wayne Leathart, who was sentenced on November 24, 2010, to 27 months in federal prison on one count of illegal possession of a machine gun. Moreover, Banks admitted that on April 23, 2010, he sold Leathart four explosive devices, commonly known as M-80s.

Following today's sentencing, Bernard J. Zapor, Special Agent in Charge of the St. Paul Field Division of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, said, "Building improvised destructive devices is a self-critiquing activity and one without second chances. These items often kill the bomb maker. In this case, a partnership of dedicated law enforcement officers prevented further risk to the public."

"Weapons have become a commonly encountered and dangerous component utilized by drug traffickers to protect their illegal operations," said Dan Moren, Assistant Special Agent in Charge of the Minneapolis-St. Paul office of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA"). "In this case, a substantial cache of weapons – machine guns, machine gun components, explosives and chemicals used to produce explosives – were seized at the same location where Mr. Banks operated a large-scale indoor marijuana grow operation. Collaborative efforts with the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives ("ATF") as well as our strong partnership with local law enforcement resulted in an investigation that ceased the

growing of marijuana that would have made it to our streets, while also keeping numerous weapons and explosives from potentially being used to perpetrate violence.”

On June 8, 2010, a federal search warrant was executed at Banks’ residence. There, authorities seized additional bombs; chemicals used to manufacture explosives; 29 firearms, including seven suspected machine guns; components to manufacture more machine guns; and an indoor grow operation containing nearly 100 marijuana plants.

This case was the result of an investigation by the St. Paul Police Department, the Ramsey County Sheriff’s Office, the DEA, and the ATF. It was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Steven L. Schleicher.

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