

## **Operation Crash**

**Summary:** Operation Crash is an ongoing proactive nation-wide effort by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (“FWS”) in coordination with the U.S. Department of Justice (“DOJ”) to detect, deter and prosecute those engaged in the illegal killing of rhinoceros and the unlawful trafficking of rhinoceros horns and elephant ivory. To date, Operation Crash has involved a dedicated group of approximately a dozen agents from the Special Operation Unit of the FWS’s Office of Law Enforcement assigned to the project on a full time basis, supplemented by the assistance of approximately 140 field agents, other law enforcement agencies, and coordination with foreign law enforcement agencies. The cases are being prosecuted by the Environmental Crimes Section of the U.S. Department of Justice’s Environment & Natural Resources Division, and ten U.S. Attorney’s Offices (Middle District of Alabama, Central District of California, District of Massachusetts, District of New Jersey, Southern District of New York, Eastern District of New York, Southern District of Florida, Eastern District of Texas, Western District of Texas, and District of Nevada).

**Background:** Since the initial arrest of eight individuals in February 2012 as part of an initial “takedown” there have been more than two dozen arrests and a dozen convictions. Operation Crash cases are pending and investigations are continuing. Charges filed against these defendants include violations of the Endangered Species Act and Lacey Act, as well as conspiracy, smuggling, money laundering, mail fraud, tax evasion, and making false documents. Operation Crash involves investigations into several different types of criminal conduct, including: (1) trafficking of raw rhinoceros horns; (2) smuggling of art objects made from rhino horn and elephant ivory, and the illegal trade in modern rhinoceros horn and ivory carvings being trafficked as antiques; and (3) investigations of illegal hunting and poaching, including the sale of outfitting services for the illegal take of rhinoceros.

### **Case Examples:**

<http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/ringleader-international-rhino-smuggling-conspiracy-sentenced-new-jersey-70-months-prison>

<http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/texas-man-pleads-guilty-rhino-and-ivory-smuggling-conspiracy>

<http://www.justice.gov/usao/nvs/pressreleases/December13/WangQiangSentencingPR.php>

<http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/smuggling-ring-sentenced-los-angeles-criminal-trafficking-endangered-rhinoceros-horn>

<http://www.justice.gov/usao/cac/Pressroom/2012/030.html>

<http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/irish-national-sentenced-serve-14-months-prison-trafficking-endangered-rhinoceros-horns>

<http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/antiques-dealer-sentenced-new-york-city-crimes-relating-illegal-trafficking-endangered>

<http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/canadian-antique-dealer-charged-trafficking-wildlife>

<http://www.justice.gov/usao/fls/PressReleases/140703-02.html>

<http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/two-california-men-indicted-selling-endangered-black-rhinoceros-horns>