

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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*For Immediate Release*

## **Former Purchasing Agent for the Sonny Bono National Wildlife Refuge Sentenced for Theft of Government Property**

**NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY** -April 24, 2012

A former purchasing agent for the Sonny Bono National Wildlife Refuge was sentenced today to 5 years probation, 250 hours of community service, and ordered to pay \$30,122.88 in restitution for having systematically stolen from the refuge over a three-year period. Gabriela Lawson, 40, a resident of Brawley, California, was sentenced by the Honorable M. James Lorenz, United States District Judge.

According to court records, Lawson was employed at the refuge for ten years. In her position, she was authorized the use of credit cards, paid for directly by Fish and Wildlife, to purchase needed supplies for the refuge. She was a trusted employee. However, at no time did Lawson have permission to use the Government credit cards for personal purchases.

In May of 2011, Lawson's credit card was flagged for suspicious activity. Thereafter, the Department of Interior, Office of Inspector General (DOI-OIG) began a review of the three Government

credit cards which Lawson had had the authority to use. The review indicated that between 2008 and 2011, she had used the cards to make more than \$30,000 in unauthorized purchases for items for her own use and that of her family. Purchases at hardware and department stores for the refuge were interspersed with purchases of "Hello Kitty" merchandise.

**DEFENDANT**

**Case No. 12-CR-1499 L**

GABRIELA LAWSON

**SUMMARY OF CHARGES**

Title 18, United States Code, Section 641 - Theft of Government Property

Maximum penalties: 10 years incarceration; 3 years supervised release; \$100 penalty assessment; \$250,000 fine and restitution

**INVESTIGATING AGENCY**

Department of Interior, Office of Inspector General