

Department of Justice

United States Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr.
Western District of New York

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MARYLAND MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO VIOLATING THE LACEY ACT

BUFFALO, N.Y.— U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr. announced today that Michael V. Johnson, 57 of Chestertown, MD, pleaded guilty before U.S. Magistrate Judge Jeremiah J. McCarthy, to a Lacey Act charge of Attempted Trafficking in Prohibited Wildlife. The charge carries a maximum penalty of one year in prison, a \$100,000 fine, or both. The Lacey Act was passed by Congress in 1900 to protect certain plants, fish and wildlife from being illegally sold.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Aaron J. Mango, who is handling the case, stated that during 2007 and 2008, the defendant operated a business known as Turtle Dextruxe, Inc., a turtle meat processing facility located in Millington, Maryland. As part of the operation, Johnson would purchase live Common Snapping Turtles from individuals located in various states who would transport the live turtles to the Turtle Deluxe facility. The defendant would sort and weigh the turtles, and then pay the individuals based on the quantity and weight of the turtles sold. Common Snapping Turtles are listed as a protected species under New York State Law.

On two occasions, the defendant purchased turtles from undercover law enforcement officers with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS-DEC) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Authorities determined that Johnson thereafter processed the turtles for their meat, and ultimately resold the meat for over \$8,400.

In addition to pleading guilty, the defendant has made donations to the following organizations: a \$7,500 donation to the Buffalo Zoo to be used to support the Herpetology Department; a \$7,500 donation to Teatown Lake Reservation, to be used for Turtle research; and a \$5,000 donation to the Tifft Nature Preserve (Buffalo Museum of Science) for Turtle research and education.

The plea is the culmination of an investigation on the part Special Agents of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service under the direction of Sal Amato, Special Agent-in-Charge, and Environmental Conservation Officers of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation under the direction of Acting Captain Frank Lauricella

Sentencing is scheduled for May 1, 2012, at 3:30 p.m., before Judge McCarthy.

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