From: Grand Teton National Park
To: County Commissioners
Subject: Park Rangers Complete Investigation--Individuals Plead Guilty to Resource Violations
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Grand Teton National Park Media Release

Park Rangers Complete Investigation

Individuals Plead Guilty to Resource Violations

MOOSE, WY-Grand Teton National Park rangers recently completed an investigation involving poaching of a bison within the park. The individuals pled guilty.

Oregon resident Gary Washington pled guilty to a violation of the Lacey Act, a Class A Misdemeanor, as he knowingly and intentionally transported an illegally taken bison after killing the animal within the park in December 2015. Additionally, Laurie Washington pled guilty to the charge of illegally taking wildlife for her role in the incident.

On December 5, 2015, two bison hunters reported they had found a suspicious scene at the end of the Elk Ranch Road. The hunters described finding a large gut pile in the road, possibly from a bison, with a drag trail in the snow originating in Grand Teton National Park. A park ranger and state wildlife warden responded to the scene and confirmed the information provided by the other hunters. Evidence indicated it was a recent kill, and the bison meat, head and hide had been removed from the scene.

Based on snowfall and evidence at the scene, investigators were able to determine the kill happened one day earlier. The investigation determined that two individuals had walked past several boundary signs prior to shooting a bull bison approximately one quarter of a mile inside the park. After shooting the bison, track evidence demonstrated that one of the individuals involved in the illegal taking of wildlife then walked out to retrieve a utility task vehicle and drove this vehicle off road back into the park, passing several more boundary signs along the way, in order to retrieve the dead bison. As a result of this retrieval, the driver of the vehicle caused significant resource damage to vegetation in the area. The animal was subsequently field dressed at a location outside of the park boundary before being transported to a campsite along the Spread Creek Road.

Information supplied by other hunters, as well as other investigative leads, led to the positive identification of suspects in this case. The investigation continued through the winter and a park ranger and a National Park Service special agent traveled to Oregon this spring to interview Gary and Laurie Washington. The Washingtons admitted to shooting the bison and cooperated with the investigation, relinquishing the bison skull, hide, meat and other associated evidence.

The Washingtons were charged and summoned to appear in court before U.S. Magistrate Judge Mark Carman. On October 11, Gary Washington pled guilty to the Lacey Act charge and Laurie Washington pled guilty to illegal take of wildlife. The sentence for Gary Washington included a financial penalty of $8,025, three years of unsupervised probation, and a world-wide hunting ban through 2017. Laurie Washington's sentence also included three years of unsupervised probation, a world-wide hunting ban through 2017, and a $35 court processing fee. Following the conclusion of the case, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department helped to coordinate the donation of several hundred pounds of recovered bison meat to community members in need.

This case is representative of the importance of resource protection within Grand Teton National Park. Members of the public are encouraged to report illegal or suspicious activity to the Teton Interagency Dispatch Center by calling 307-739-3301. In this recent bison poaching incident, information from other hunters initiated the investigation by Grand Teton National Park Rangers and Wyoming Game and Fish Wardens.

Hunters in the area are reminded that it is the individual's responsibility to know permitted hunt area boundaries. Hunting close to a national park boundary can be problematic, especially when a wounded animal crosses into a closed area. In these cases, immediate notification should be made to Grand Teton National Park and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

Attachment:
16-71 Rangers Complete Investigation Bison Poach.pdf

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Grand Teton National Park and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway preserve 333,700 acres in northwest Wyoming for future generations. Over 3.1 million people visited the park and parkway in 2015 to enjoy the Teton Range, pristine lakes, the Snake River, and the valley of Jackson Hole. Visit us at www.nps.gov/grte, on www.facebook.com/GrandTetonNPS, via www.twitter.com/GrandTetonNPS, and at www.instagram.com/grandtetonnps.

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