



New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
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Wildlife crimes net \$74,000 in restitution

SANTA FE – On June 23, 2020, Sandoval County Judge James A. Noel ordered Cody W. Davis of Arnegard, N.D. to pay \$74,000 in restitution to the state for poaching a trophy mule deer buck.

This civil restitution included \$20,000 for the mule deer which was killed out of season, without a license and resulted in the waste of game and an additional \$54,000 in reimbursement to the Department for the extensive investigation required for this case. The restitution to the state is in addition to his criminal conviction which included a \$3,000 donation to Operation Game Thief (OGT).

An OGT tip in December of 2015 initiated the investigation. Conservation officers searched the area in question and found a large headless mule deer buck near Lindrith, N.M. Officers were then able to locate the stashed severed head and conducted nearly 24/7 surveillance on the head's location. When Davis loaded the mule deer head into his truck four months later, officers were there watching. Davis led the surveillance officers down HWY 550, towards Bernalillo, to the bridge over the Rio Grande where he dumped the trophy head in an attempt to avoid getting caught.

Conservation officers and biologists conducted a grid search of the river for nearly two weeks and eventually found the mule deer head. The recovered head scored 232 7/8" using the Safari Club International system, a score that far exceeds the highest range of trophy scores and associated values listed in the regulations of Section 19.30.11.7 NMAC.

Department officers then traveled to Davis' home at the time in Dickinson, N.D. where they worked with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to serve a search warrant that resulted in a full confession from Davis. Davis, originally from Lindrith, N.M., has an extensive history of game law violations in New Mexico dating back to 2000.

At the conclusion of the investigation, nearly 2,000 hours had been logged, over 25,000 miles were driven and numerous search warrants were conducted in two

different states. "It was a long investigation, involving many conservation officers, Department biologists and staff from every part of the agency," Conservation Officer Ben Otero said. "It also would not have been possible without support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife and North Dakota Game and Fish Department."

At the State Game Commission meeting June 25, Director Mike Sloane announced the judgement saying "I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the dedication and perseverance of all of our officers in their ceaseless pursuit of wildlife violators and our legal staff for the support they provide." Sloane continued, "We anticipate that this case may be appealed but feel comfortable that we have a strong argument in support of the final order of the District Court."

OGT is a New Mexico Department of Game and Fish program, which pays rewards to citizens who turn in poachers. Since 1977, Operation Game Thief is the Crime-Stoppers for wildlife. Anyone with information about wildlife crimes is encouraged to call Operation Game Thief at (800) 432-4263. Callers can remain anonymous and may be eligible for rewards if information leads to charges being filed.

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