

Citizen Stop Poaching Tips Lead to State and Federal Poaching Convictions

Casper – Illegally harvesting elk, deer and a black bear out of season and with improper licenses in 2008 and 2009 north of Hanna, and transporting the animals across state lines, has resulted in state and federal convictions for three nonresidents, including a co-owner of the 9V Ranch.

Karl G. Schakel, 60, of Fort, Collins, Colorado and one of several co-owners of the 9V Ranch, was levied \$30,030 in fines, restitution and court costs for federal and state charges of fraudulently buying resident Wyoming hunting licenses, transferring licenses to nonresident friends, accessory to the illegal take of deer, elk and black bear and assisting in transporting illegally killed game across state lines.

Alex E. Akin, 34, of Dalhart, Texas was fined \$500 and assessed \$5,000 restitution for federal Lacey Act violations of transporting a black bear illegally killed on the 9V Ranch across state lines.

Jack W. White, 69, of Dalhart, Texas was assessed \$4,000 in restitution for federal Lacey Act violations for his role in transporting an illegally killed buck mule deer across state lines.

The investigation started in September 2009 when illegal hunting was observed beyond the locked gates of the 9V Ranch and culminated in October 2016 with the last of the plea agreements being reached with defendants.

Acting on tips from concerned citizens, game wardens Jason Hunter and Kelly Todd put six hunters on the 9V under surveillance September 14-17, 2009. Watching from neighboring property, the officers observed elk and mule deer killed with rifles during a period when only the archery season was open. On September 18, the officers served a search warrant on the ranch's buildings and collected deer and elk parts, along with portions of a 2009 resident elk and deer license issued to Schakel. The officers also seized fish, rifles, ammunition, two ATVs and a 1986 Toyota Land Cruiser used in the hunts.



Surveillance photos of suspects during September, 2009.



Dirty job—Investigators search through trash left behind by suspects to recover evidence.

With the suspects leaving the day before the search warrant was issued, suspects were identified from matching license plates to driver's license photos and interviews with informants.

In February 2010, interviews were held simultaneously with suspects in Dalhart, Texas and Fort Collins and Wiggins, Colorado by Wyoming, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Colorado Department of Parks and Wildlife officers. The interviews obtained sufficient information to serve federal search warrants on the homes of Brant and Alex Akin in Dalhart, Texas. A full-body black bear mount, photographs, computer storage devices, firearms and cell phones were seized as evidence. The information led officers to the Amarillo, Texas taxidermist who mounted the bear in 2008. Skulls and capes from the elk and mule deer killed on the 9V Ranch in September 2009 were discovered at the business. The taxidermist, who cooperated fully with the investigation and was not involved in the violations, also provided the work invoices and photos associated with the animals.



“This case was very complicated with multiple suspects in two states and the violations involving multiple legal jurisdictions,” said Mike Ehlebracht, supervisor of the Game and Fish Department’s Wildlife Investigative Unit. “With that, and large caseloads for the prosecutors involved and several defense motions, it took seven years to completely wrap up the case.”

Black bear killed illegally in 2008.

In a plea agreement reached August 26, 2013, Alex Akin pleaded guilty to the misdemeanor Lacey Act violation of the illegal take and transportation of the black bear. Forfeiting the black bear mount was included in the sentence.

In a June 19, 2015 plea agreement, White pleaded guilty to the misdemeanor federal Lacey Act violation of the illegal transportation of a buck mule deer across state lines. In addition to his restitution, White was ordered to forfeit the deer antlers and cape.



Elk and deer antlers seized as evidence in the investigation.

On August 5, 2015, Schakel pleaded guilty to the federal misdemeanor Lacey Act violation of transporting the illegally killed bull elk across state lines. He was fined \$6,000, assessed \$8,000 in restitution and ordered to forfeit the 6-by-6 elk antlers and cape. On August 9, 2016, he pleaded guilty in Albany County, Wyoming to fraudulently obtaining resident general elk and deer licenses. His hunting, fishing and trapping license privileges were suspended for five years and he paid \$80 in court costs. The Albany County Attorney dismissed another 29 counts of license fraud dating back to 1997.

The 9V Ranch is in limited quota Elk Hunt Area 16, which offered only a 21-percent chance of drawing the bull elk license for nonresidents with maximum preference points in the regular draw in 2009. Residents had only a 19-percent chance of drawing the license. The bull elk killed in the case was tagged with Schakel's over-the-counter resident general elk license.

Although Schakel was a partial owner of a Wyoming ranch, he did not qualify for resident license privileges. He did not reside the required full year in Wyoming before buying resident licenses. No other 9V Ranch owners were involved in the crimes.



Full body mount of illegally taken black bear seized as evidence and forfeited by suspect.

On Oct. 19, 2016, Schakel pleaded guilty in Carbon County, Wyoming to the 2008 violations of accessory to illegally killing a black bear and fraudulently obtaining a black bear license and the 2009 violations of accessory to the illegal take of a buck and doe mule deer. He was fined \$15,790 and assessed \$226 in court costs and his hunting, fishing and trapping license privileges were suspended for an additional five years. He was also ordered to forfeit the 9V's two ATVs and Toyota Land Cruiser used in the crimes. The Carbon County Attorney dismissed another five counts of accessory to the illegal take of big game.

“We first received information about potential illegal hunting on the 9V Ranch more than 25 years ago, but we never knew when hunters were coming to the ranch and attempted surveillance proved unsuccessful,” Ehlebracht said. “With the advent of the Game and Fish’s computer-based license system, we were alerted when Schakel bought big game licenses and we guessed correctly his hunting acquaintances would be arriving soon.”

Since Wyoming is a member of the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact, Schakel’s hunting, fishing and trapping license privileges are suspended in 43 other states, including Colorado, in addition to Wyoming, through 2026.

The federal restitution paid by the defendants will be returned to Wyoming to assist with wildlife law enforcement.