

# Law claws back at bear killer

In a landmark case, a Brownsville man is convicted of racketeering

By Sara Jarrett  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Raymond Edward Hillsman, a 48-year-old Brownsville resident, could face up to 20 years in prison and/or pay up to \$300,000 for killing and selling body parts of black bears, bobcats and other big game.

A jury convicted Hillsman of racketeering, a class-A felony, and unlawful hunting and pursuing of black bear using dogs, a class-A misdemeanor, on June 17. His sentencing is scheduled for September 13 at 11 a.m. in Douglas County Circuit Court.

Peter Cogswell, a spokesperson for the Oregon Department of Justice, was unable to disclose the exact sentence recommendation that will be made, but it will definitely ask for jail time in lieu of a fine, he said.

Hillsman is considered a key figure in an evidently well-organized group of people that "communally harvested bears for personal gain," said Capt. Lindsay Ball, Director of the Oregon State Police's Fish & Wildlife Division.

A two-year investigation, made possible by complaints from private citizens, led to the execution of 16 search warrants resulting in the recovery of 28 bear gall bladders, four complete bear heads and hides, numerous bobcat hides and pounds of big-game meat. The extractions took place at 19 residences and two businesses in Linn, Benton, Marion, Lincoln and Lane Counties on May 4, 1998, according to Greg Hastings of the Oregon State Police.

An overseas demand for the believed medicinal qualities of the gall bladders is the rumored impetus for Hillsman's collection of that body part, Cogswell said. The Oregon State Police predict the market for bear gall bladders ranges between \$200 and \$600,

depending on each individual size.

The amount of bears that were actually poached "is still yet to be known," Ball said. The police assume other bear parts were sought after but think most of the bodies were left to waste.

Hillsman is the first Oregonian to be convicted of racketeering based on multiple violations of Oregon's wildlife laws. Wildlife offenses became grounds for racketeering, the offense of engaging in multiple crimes as part of an ongoing criminal enterprise, in 1993.

"The magnitude of the waste, the complete indifference toward Oregon's hunting laws and the ruthlessness of the methods used — all merited seeking the racketeering conviction," Oregon Attorney General Hardy Myers said in a released statement.

The 48 predicate offenses that support Hillsman's indictment include several incidents each of unlawful hunting and pursuing of black bear using dogs, unlawful taking of black bear during closed season, unlawful hunting of black bear during closed season, unlawful sale of wildlife parts and unlawful waste of a game animal.

"This is a landmark case in fish-and-wildlife investigations."

**Capt. Lindsay Ball**  
Director of the Oregon State Police  
Fish & Wildlife Division

"This is a landmark case in fish-and-wildlife investigations," Ball said. "This should send a strong message to other individuals about how strongly Oregonians feel about their natural resources."

Enforcement officers from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Fish and Game, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Los Angeles Police Department, Linn County Sheriff's Office and Lane County Interagency Narcotics Enforcement Team all assisted the Oregon State Police Fish & Wildlife Division in the investigation. Prosecutors from Douglas County, Lane County, Linn County, Lincoln County, Marion County, Oregon Department of Justice and the U.S. Attorney's Office are also involved.

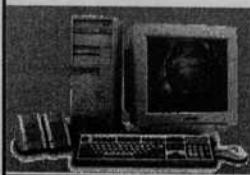
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