



2009 Investigative Report

California Fish and Game Wardens

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"It is horrifying that we have to fight our own government to save the environment." — **Ansel Adams**

Lack of Game Wardens costs California more than \$100 million in resource damage

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Early morning arrests on April 10, 2009, shut down another Eastern European black market operation of sturgeon and salmon poaching. California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) officers and the Special Operations Unit (SOU) of DFG covered several communities in and around the Sacramento area netting seven arrests in Operation Colusa Clan. This makes the eighth major sturgeon poaching takedown operation since 2003.



Wardens arrested seven Sacramento area men suspected of catching sturgeon using juvenile salmon as bait, then selling the illegally harvested fish for personal profit. Dubbed Operation Colusa Clan, it is the eighth major sturgeon poaching operation since 2003. Most of the fish were caught in Colusa County. "We are using every resource we have available to keep up with sturgeon and salmon poaching," said Nancy Foley, Chief of DFG's Law Enforcement Division. "This is a huge case we will continue to make every effort to stop poaching."



Ongoing sturgeon and abalone poaching has a negative impact on the species," said DFG SOU leader Lt. Kathy Ponting. "Both are slow growing animals which makes them exceptionally vulnerable to population decline." Sturgeon has been over-harvested primarily for the international caviar market. In Northern California that market remains controlled by Eastern European organizations that harvest the eggs for caviar, killing breeding females, some up to 60 years old. In addition to poaching, habitat degradation and destruction in the lakes and streams has helped contribute to the decline of the species. Since the collapse of the sturgeon/caviar industry of the Caspian Sea, North America and Canada have become the prime sources for caviar production. According to DFG, the amount of sturgeon harvested for caviar is unsustainable due to the extent of black market trade.

Simultaneously, with sturgeon poaching comes the extensive poaching of young salmon used as bait for sturgeon. "With young salmon as bait we're hit twice on this— salmon and sturgeon," said Lt. Ponting. "The illegal use of juvenile salmon for sturgeon bait jeopardizes an already fragile Sacramento River Salmon Run. We commonly find those who poach sturgeon for profit illegally net large quantities of juvenile salmon fry found along the shoreline. This practice has a significant impacts on both species at once.." With recent declines in salmon spawning numbers due to the poaching of juveniles and larger fish, the environmental imperative remains that the decline of both species could indicate a Titanic-like effect that cannot be reversed.

Fish biologists also agree that part of the decline is due to habitat degradation from pollution and hazardous material spills besides experiencing water quality issues such as dam construction and loss of suitable habitat. United States Forest Service (USFS) Fish Biologist Ryan Foote agrees. "It's really hard to point the finger at any one thing that would be causing poor water conditions. It tends to be a multitude of factors acting collectively to alter water quality and fish habitat."

"Abalone take approximately 12 years to reach the minimum sport take size of 7. Sturgeon can live up to 100 years and large egg bearing females spawn every 4-6 years," said Lt. Ponting. "When they start getting very large they're pretty old. A lot of the sturgeon that were poached in (Operation Colusa Clan) were very old. There are minimum and maximum limits for protection of smaller species for future generations and for big breeders to make it up river." In these cases very large females are taken and killed for their eggs, and in most cases the poaching kills many other juveniles and males, destroying habitat and ending the egg production of a large female that is capable of spawning many more times.

A lot of these resources are very finite and we are the stewards of these resources. They belong to the people of the state as a privilege to harvest for personal and commercial use so we have to protect and regulate, but if there is not enough of us that won't happen." DFG Game Warden Gary Combes with large take of poached adult abalone from Northern California, which would have been illegally sold to restaurants all over the state.



In sturgeon poaching cases, very large females are taken and killed for their eggs, and in most cases the poaching kills many other juveniles and males, destroying habitat and ending the egg production of large females that are capable of spawning many more times.



"We are using every resource we have available to keep up with the sturgeon and salmon poaching," said DFG Enforcement Division Chief, Nancy Foley. DFG unfortunately operates with a small enforcement division that covers 1100 miles of coastline, more than 200,000 square miles of ocean that includes recently increased Marine Protection Areas (MPAs) that can't all be patrolled with so little manpower. In addition, inland patrol has recently taken a toll in increased poaching in Northern California that hampers a department further damaged by a lack of personnel due to recent game wardens retiring.

According to Chief Foley, with the current increased MPAs and more than a hundred more being implemented through current legislation, game wardens will be taxed to monitor illegal fishing activity and habitat degradation in areas of prime concern for salmon populations as well as other species that are at risk such as abalone and sturgeon. To add insult to injury the state has again declared a moratorium on commercial salmon fishing that will further damage the economy, putting many outfits that supply Northern California out of jobs and business. Without the assistance of legal fisherman in these areas, illegal operations will likely increase their poaching activities, nearly sight unseen. Without proper enforcement, poaching and habitat destruction will cause serious and irrevocable damage to species at risk.

"With sixty-six thousand fishery businesses operating in California alone and thousands of those businesses operating in San Francisco, it is a nearly impossible feat to patrol that much area with only one game warden and patrol vessel," said Chief Foley.

Wildlife poaching, which includes salmon, sturgeon, deer, bear, abalone, crab and many others as well as protected species such as bald eagle, condor and a wide range of amphibians and snakes, has drastically increased as warden numbers continue to plummet. In a press release on April 3, DFG reported, 'Three weeks after finding an adult male condor with 15 shotgun pellets lodged in its body, biologists at the Ventana Wildlife Society found three lead pellets in a juvenile female. The second bird, condor #375, was trapped by biologists on March 26 in Big Sur. "We were alarmed when one condor was found shot, but now with two birds in such a short time, we are deeply concerned," said Kelly Sorenson, director of Ventana Wildlife Society.' The condor is a Federal Endangered Species. In 1982 there were only 22 condors in the world living. Currently, condors' survival is still precarious with only 320 worldwide.

Starting salaries of approximately \$43,000 for field game wardens positions that require 60 college units are too low to compete with other law enforcement agencies in the state of California such as the California Highway Patrol (CHP), another state law enforcement agency. CHP has a starting wage of approximately

\$65,000 and requires only a high school diploma or GED. With the personal risk and requirements involved for field game wardens many who initially test and train eventually transfer to higher paying law enforcement departments elsewhere.

"Poaching is one reason why sturgeon struggle to maintain healthy populations," said Chief Foley. Because of sturgeon poaching "the current population of adult white sturgeon in California is low" and the green sturgeon is on the Endangered Species List." There are only 220 field game wardens in California, a state that has become a haven for illegal activity in the trafficking of wildlife and resources, both domestically and internationally. Bear parts have been widely transported internationally as well as other rare species of animals, many amphibians, that thrive here and are also endangered and native to California.



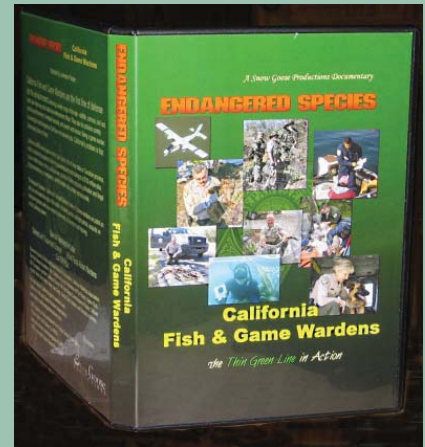
Bears are illegally hunted for their paws and gall bladders, teeth and hides, which are sold on the black market to be distributed domestically and internationally. The market for bear parts is strong for Asian medicinals that are believed to have healing properties for a wide range of incurable diseases.



In an interview for a documentary on game wardens by film maker James Swan titled "Endangered Species: California Fish and Game Wardens", Chief Foley stated, "Poaching for profit in California is second only to the illegal drug trade. In the mid 1990's the value of stolen resources was over \$100 million. Since that time I can only guess that it's doubled or tripled."

To see video and testimony on this go to

www.jamesswan.com/snowgoose/wardendoc.html



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Nancy Foley, DFG Enforcement Division Chief.



Political agenda interferes with protecting California resources

Now, when California's natural resources are at their most vulnerable, the California Department of Fish and Game is operating with very little funding and support in addition to a very small law enforcement division that includes two day a month furloughs. This leaves California's natural resources further unprotected at a point when so many are threatened and field game warden numbers are already at a historical low per capita, state and nationwide.

"Game warden staffing levels remain the same as the number of wardens in the 1950s, not per capita, but the actual number of wardens across the state today as there were in 1950," said California Fish and Game Warden Association (CFGWA) representative and 30 year veteran game warden, Bob Orange. "As of now,

California's ratio of game wardens to the state's general population is the worst of all 50 states and the Canadian provinces. A particularly sad state of affairs considering the fact that California contains some of the most diverse wildlife and fisheries resources in the nation.."

It is estimated in a Congressional Report submitted as recently as March 3, 2008 and updated Feb 2, 2009 the commercial global "demand for illegally obtained wildlife is ubiquitous." In other words analysts describe financial losses to the United States may "potentially total in excess of \$20 billion annually". The document titled *International Illegal Trade in Wildlife: Threats and U.S. Policy* Congressional Research Service: Report, can be viewed at http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RL34395_20090202.pdf. Compiled by Congressional Analysts Liana Sun Wyler, Analyst in International Crime and Narcotics Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division and Pervaze A Sheikh, Analyst in Natural Resource Policy Resources and Industry Division cites links to drug trafficking with illicit wildlife trade as well as terrorism and "significant drug production and trafficking". The report concluded that not only are there substantial financial losses of wildlife there is also a considerable amount of habitat and environmental damage that includes "reducing biodiversity...disrupting ecosystems by introducing non-native species" and "transmitting disease." In addition to these issues is a considerable criminal aspect that is "often linked to organized crime and can involve the same actors who traffic drugs, arms and persons."

The effect on the environment and wildlife are evident in the collapse of the salmon, abalone, sturgeon and deer populations in addition to the increased poaching activity across the state due to the lack of enforcement.

During Governor Schwarzenegger's first year in office he vetoed the hiring of 50 additional game wardens authorized by the state legislature and in his second year his administration, through State Department of Personnel Administration (DPA), severely reduced the funds that had been allocated by the legislature for game wardens. The following year the governor cut the game wardens overtime back by over half from that authorized by California legislators and last year the administration attempted to cut 38 game warden positions when they were already the worst in the nation in staffing levels. This year the governor proposed to layoff 98 field wardens, which were later rescinded.

In a statement at the confirmation hearing this year, for DFG Director Don Koch, CFGWA Legislative Liaison and game warden Jerry Karnow said, "CFGWA will not offer an endorsement to any Director appointed by this Governor... Not until the Governor, who appears to foster the demise of the protectors of our environment and natural resources, makes a tangible commitment to his game wardens to maintain or increase law enforcement personnel, will we offer support" for Koch's confirmation.

'Wildlife crime, habitat destruction, and water pollution are out of control in our state. Warden investigations document the illegal take of wildlife with regularity. Our work establishes there is both a statewide and world-wide network in the illegal trade of fish and wildlife. Water pollution continues to plague our state and game wardens are there to hold accountable individuals and companies that ignore pollution laws. It's tragic our state professes to be a leader in the "green" movement yet will not hire or maintain enough staffing to protect our natural resources'. CFGWA Legislative Liaison and DFG Game Warden Jerry Karnow.

"Lack of a stable funding source for DFG wardens will continue to hamper the State's effort to recruit, retain and fairly compensate game wardens, resulting in a continual loss and degradation of this State's fish and wildlife resources and the habitats upon which they depend," said DFG Patrol Vessel Captain Dave Fox who patrols the San Francisco Bay and thousands of miles of surrounding ocean and coastline.

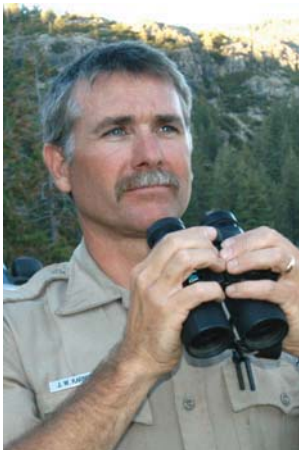
Poaching, local prosecution of poachers and all game violations, fines and fine collections and cooperation with local prosecutors on DFG violations were issues discussed among representatives from various County Fish and Game Commissions in California.

Bill Karr of Western Outdoor News reported, "An all-day meeting between over 40 representatives of various California County Fish and Game Commissioners at the Sutter Club in Sacramento on February 4 opened the door to formation of the new Association". At the meeting to create the new California Association of County Fish and Game Commissions, Chief Foley explained that poaching is on the rise as warden numbers decrease because of funding restrictions.

Poaching becomes rampant as economy of California fails

"This year alone evidence of over 200 deer, in just one case, has been poached. Abalone and sturgeon poaching is out of control," said Karnow. "There is a need to protect natural resources because they are why humans exist. We have the responsibility of protecting the water quality, wildlife and habitat. Wardens are the professionals that teach conservation of natural resources and at the same time are protecting the public."

Since the 200 poached deer from Williams, CA there have already been other cases such as 27 poached deer in Sacramento, a 78" sturgeon in San Jose and in Gilroy a man killed 335 waterfowl that represented "every species of waterfowl that migrates to and from California" as quoted in a DFG report on Recent/Ongoing Poaching Investigations dated Feb 26, 2009.



In November 2008, a Gilroy man was convicted of killing 335 waterfowl. "The birds represented every species of waterfowl that migrates to and from California." Nancy Foley, DFG Enforcement Division Chief.

As recently as February 24, five antelope were killed in Lassen County and left to suffer slow deaths after being shot. Two of the antelope were female and carried three fetuses. A majority of the officers that investigated these poaching cases received layoff notices that were later rescinded.



As recently as February 24, 2009 a poacher in Susanville, California shot five antelope and left them to suffer and die. Two of them were female and carried three fetuses.

According to DFG, these displays of continued disregard for the wildlife of California and for the law are only a fraction of what is really at stake. Game wardens are on patrol in areas that are off the grid and far removed from mainstream society, but where these types of crimes generally occur. Because the majority of suspects reside in large cities, wardens must conduct surveillance, investigations and arrests at businesses in cities where poachers sell their illegal products. With so few game wardens statewide, excessive poaching and habitat damage continues to escalate. In addition to poaching, rural areas also harbor drug labs and other illegal operations and organizations that are hidden in the wilderness to avoid detection.

“Poaching and calls for service goes on 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, yet we don’t have enough game wardens in the field to staff one shift a day much less three shifts every day of the year. With a stable funding source we could use at least triple the number of wardens we have, so that we could provide more coverage and have a better chance of deterring and apprehending violators,” said Fox.

Bob Orange presents an even bleaker perspective on the current status of game wardens. “In September 2006 the (California) Legislature appropriated funding to solve the Game Warden recruitment and retention crisis,” he said. But in a strange twist in closed door negotiations with no DFG representative present “the Schwarzenegger Administration through the State Department of Personnel Administration (DPA) bargained away the money in a series of deals with CAUSE/CSLEA (California Statewide Law Enforcement Association) to benefit non-sworn personnel,” said Orange.

Non-Supportive Parent Union CAUSE/CSLEA stifles DFG efforts to recruit

A supporter of game wardens, Senator Dave Cox said, in a letter to a constituent, “Last year, I joined 78 of my legislative colleagues in asking the Budget Conference Committee to retain \$17.5 million toward the compensation (of game wardens) issue. In the end, the 2006-2007 budget contained nearly \$30 million in order to address both new positions and compensation.”

“Of the original \$30 million appropriated by the legislature, \$18 million was specifically identified for game wardens. The wardens only received \$2 million after negotiations with their parent union CAUSE. The Administration argued that wardens received a 25% increase. The purpose of the appropriations was to rectify serious inequities between warden salaries, which started at \$37,000 and other law enforcement officer salaries that start in the \$50,000 range.” To view the document and other support letters go to, www.californiafishandgamewardens.com/docs/ExposeUpdate2007Standard.pdf

Recruitment for game wardens is ineffectual since the base rate is extremely low in comparison with other law enforcement agencies while the risk factor is high. Typically, more than one officer responds to a member of the public with a firearm. For game wardens however, they are generally alone when they patrol and almost always have to approach someone with a firearm or weapon of some type such as fishing and hunting knives.

Currently, recruitment and game warden numbers are being critically reduced by wardens transferring to better paying jobs and an overall reduction of the force by at least one-third of field game wardens that will be lost to retirement over the next three years.

“Lack of a stable funding source for DFG wardens will continue to hamper the State’s effort to recruit, retain and fairly compensate game wardens, resulting in a continual loss and degradation of this State’s fish and wildlife resources and the habitats upon which they depend.” DFG Marine Game Warden Dave Fox, Patrol Vessel Captain, San Francisco.



“In order for DFG to recruit and retain top notch game wardens, we must get on a stable funding source, like the CHP has from vehicle registration and drivers license fees. Due to our wages being considerably lower than other local law enforcement agencies and the CHP, we are experiencing a severe lack of qualified applicants to even take the entrance exam for becoming a game warden,” said Fox. “As we have not lowered our qualifications for becoming a game warden, only a small fraction of those that pass the exam are actually hired as game wardens. With a stable funding source, wages could be significantly increased and we would have little trouble recruiting and retaining more qualified applicants.”

Unlike most law enforcement agencies the DFG requires 60 college units for applicants to apply as game wardens. At the academy there is also a significant amount of study in species identification and other skills needed for wildlife crime investigation and resource protection

Approximately three years ago, CFGWA representatives Jerry Karnow, Bob Orange, Jake Bushey and others presented information to the legislature on the damage to California’s resources without proper law enforcement.



Salmon and other species at risk will suffer and disappear without protection

“Salmon habitat continues to degrade and yet the Game Wardens who have the responsibility to enforce laws to prevent environmental degradation are too few to monitor the more

than 18,000 miles of streams and creeks, nearly 200,000 square miles of ocean, and all of the industries that have a direct impact upon California’s salmon.” CFGWA Representative and DFG Game Warden, Bob Orange.



At a hearing last year before California Legislators, CFGWA representative Bob Orange introduced a document indicating the “direct correlation of” the decline in salmon populations with “a lack of wardens enforcing the law and the lack of game wardens in California.” Orange further explained, “Because of the severe lack of marine game wardens, patrol boats go unmanned. Meanwhile, poaching goes unchecked and resources are over-harvested and poached by commercial interests.”

In March of this year, 98 game wardens were issued layoff notices but the proposal was later rescinded. The layoffs could have critically hampered natural resource protection by destroying the DFG enforcement division. This layoff proposal came close on the heels of a 10 percent cut in pay due to the two day a month furloughs, which California Highway Patrol is not subjected to, nor are they threatened by layoffs.

With the ever-increasing amount of citations and arrests of poachers and violators, wardens are over extended and are ill equipped to deal with the volume of crime being exacted on wildlife and resources in California. Even with the staggering amount of poaching and over harvesting arrests and citations by DFG, many more than are actually caught get away with poaching because of the lack of enforcement.



MPAs risk poaching, habitat damage without proper enforcement

According to Orange, MPAs and Marine Life Protection Areas (MLPAs) of California are areas where the cost of living is higher because it's a coastal environment. A serious shortage of wardens in these areas is becoming more problematic as MLPAs are increased and less wardens are available to enforce the law due to transfers to better paying law enforcement jobs or currently, retirement. "Within Game Warden circles the acronym MPA is known as Marine Poaching Areas," said Orange.



Bear poaching has become a critical problem for game wardens to control since gall bladders and other bear parts fetch a high price on the black market, domestically and internationally.

As recently as April, this year, a sea otter and an elephant seal were decapitated at Morro Strand State Beach. DFG believes the skulls were intentionally taken but are still investigating the incident. Both species are protected and any hunting or possession of parts is illegal under California law as a threatened species under the Federal Endangered Species Act. A DFG biologist found the decapitated bodies on April 7 and 8 a short distance from each other and believed the heads were removed sometime in the evening of the April 6 or early morning of April 7.

As patrol vessel captains, both Dave Fox and Keith Long know what it is to have to patrol an area that takes weeks for one vessel to cover. The increase in MPAs by the current administration without an increase in patrol and support has made this problematic trying to cover one area only to have another being depleted in a large and illegal operation.

"Without adequate warden forces enforcing the MPA boundaries and special regulations within the MLPAs it only stands to reason that violations (poaching) will increase as more MLPAs are brought on-line," said Captain Fox.

In 2007 "California experienced the smallest recorded fall run of salmon in its history, due in large part to increased poaching at a time when there were not enough game wardens to cover the necessary areas," said Orange. "Salmon habitat continues to degrade and yet the game wardens who have the responsibility to enforce laws to prevent environmental degradation are too few to monitor the more than 18,000 miles of streams and creeks, nearly 200,000 square miles of ocean, and all of the industries that have a direct impact upon California's salmon."



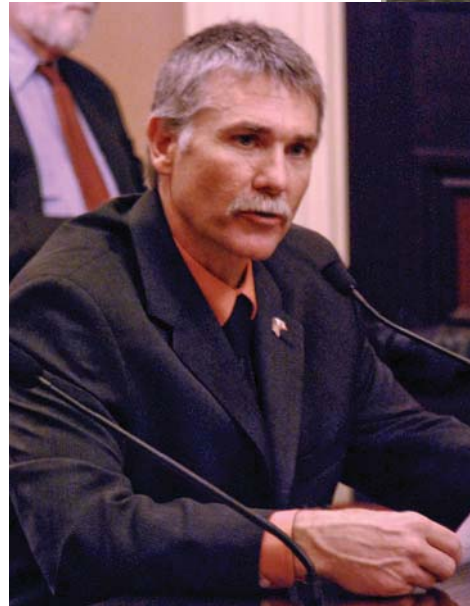


Recently retired DFG patrol vessel captain, Lt. Keith Long said of the increase in MPAs, "How are they going to protect the salmon? The passing of a bill is not what is needed unless we have the physical bodies of wardens out there to enforce the regulations. Why do you think they call us the thin green line?"



Water Quality will be left unprotected for Californians

The DFG is a "formidable law enforcement presence in the state," said Karnow, "and half of the cops that arrested suspects in poaching investigations got layoff notices. This alone is tragic with a lack of protection to wildlife and natural resources in the state," said Karnow. "The governor continues to claim he supports the environment while at the same time leaving resources open to destruction or complete degradation, especially the water supply. A vital natural resource to all life is water quality," he said.



A train accident caused a chemical tank car to fall into the Sacramento River, spilling 19,000 gallons of the herbicide metam sodium. The chemical impacts extended over 20 miles from the spill site to Lake Shasta.

Water pollution continues to plague our state and game wardens are there to hold accountable individuals and companies that ignore pollution laws. It's tragic our state professes to be a leader in the "green" movement yet will not hire or maintain enough staffing to protect our natural resources." CFGWA Legislative Liaison and DFG Game Warden, Jerry Karnow at Confirmation Hearing for interim DFG Director Don Koch.

"Last year I investigated a one-half million gallon sewage spill into a creek in Roseville that was a sensitive salmon spawning area. It created great concern and media attention and untold costs in damage and cleanup and it took a warden two days to respond due to a lack of officers. All officers at that time were working on other investigations and pollution incidents across the state," said Karnow.



These resources that are vitally important qualities necessary to all life, humans equally, are patrolled and enforced by DFG. Protection of water quality, water sources from all types of hazards to water supplies must not be degraded for survival of any species. "Two out of three calls to the DFG poaching hotline do not receive a response due to the lack of officers," said Orange. "February 18, 2009 the state sent layoff / surplus notices to 98 field game wardens in the state." Representing the CFGWA, Orange and Karnow have worked continually to educate the legislature with regard to the need to protect the wildlife, habitat, water quality and resources of California.

"California already has the worst ratio of game wardens per capita in the nation and provinces of Canada. Nearly 40 percent of the existing Game Warden force will reach retirement age within the next few years," he said. "If layoffs occur, there will be few if any game wardens remaining. California can expect to see increased, uncontrollable poaching and degradation of natural resources as a result."

CFGWA received support from Senator Dennis Hollingsworth who stated in a letter dated Feb 12, 2009, "the future of California's natural resources...is closely tied to our ability to protect them from depletion, and in that regard, we are in serious trouble as California has the worst game wardens per capita ratio of any state or Canadian province – about 200 in the field for the entire state. At one time, in fact, it was estimated that the black market in illegal wildlife trafficking was over \$100 million a year in California. In these troubled times, and with so few wardens in the field, it's likely that this figure has grown significantly." Hollingsworth went on to emphasize that "the vital role that Fish and Game Wardens play is virtually unknown to most Californians, and their participation in conservation efforts, law enforcement and homeland security is not understood. This has a dramatic effect on their profession with respect to support, recruitment, and retention."

Unchecked poaching leads to habitat damage as well as species destruction

At this time, poaching in California is a paramount concern for DFG. In a recent press release from DFG, Chief Foley said, "Poachers who sell California's wildlife for profit can cause irreparable harm to wildlife populations. Commercialization of wildlife cases is a warden's highest priority." This statement, in a press release, was in response to a poaching case from December 4, 2008 "Wardens collected tissue samples from several butchered deer carcasses found in deer winter range primarily in El Dorado County. On Jan. 3, wardens arrested Lofoo Saetern, age 42, during a deer

meat sale and later Merry Nian Saechao, age 61, both of Sacramento at the home where they simultaneously served a search warrant. Upon conclusion of the search warrant and forensic tests that were conducted, wardens discovered at least 28 deer at the house and approximately 200 pounds of meat. Also, discovered at the house were abalone packaged individually with weight recordings on each bag, 19 squirrels and packaged blue gill, a popular fish found in California, all presumably for sale".

Big game in California, bear and deer, are regularly poached as trophies and profit for the meat besides rare and exotic animals and amphibians that thrive here or are native to California but rare elsewhere. Black market products include bear gall bladders and other organs processed as oriental medicine, apparently the answer of physical relief for ailments from colds to impotence, incurable diseases and cancers. There have been many operations by DFG SOU to stop poaching and black market operations but these crimes are on the rise and the department remains under funded and under staffed of field game wardens.



On January 11, 2009, Game wardens conducted a search warrant on a Williams man suspected of deer poaching. They found over 200 sets of deer antlers at his residence.

While funding for DFG law enforcement is being hacked away, natural resources such as drinking water, wildlife and habitat will always be at risk with more Californians out of work and who have lost their homes to foreclosure. Many will do anything to make money, even just survive, if it means exploiting the resources until they are completely devastated.

California's DFG Enforcement Division and SOU leads nationally and globally in wildlife crime prevention and investigation

The direct link from California to the worldwide black market in wildlife has become highly profitable, especially in bear, sturgeon, and abalone. Three years ago DFG sent two SOU game wardens to Cambodia to instruct Asian wildlife officers on how to investigate wildlife crimes, conduct investigations and evaluate crime scenes. An integrated network of law enforcement agencies gathered in Cambodia to receive this instruction, sponsored by the ASEAN-WEN Project. Agencies included customs, police, prosecutors, specialized governmental wildlife law enforcement organizations and other agencies that work to prevent the illicit hunting, harvesting and transnational trade of rare and endangered species of animals and plants. The training was collaboration of law enforcement agencies through 10 cooperating countries in an effort to preserve their exotic wildlife that is dwindling because of poaching and black market activity.

"Ten or so East Asian countries signed an agreement as a wildlife enforcement network to put forth the effort to control the poaching and sale of tigers, bears, elephants, toucans, parrots and other animals that have medicinal value and are species that are poached and exported out of the country," said Lt. Ponting. The class proved that California DFG is leading the way to help wildlife protection efforts, to conserve natural

resources and investigate poaching as poaching is one of the largest black market trades second only to drug trade. Training this new investigation unit was Lt. Ponting and Lt. John Nores. "The class we put on was focused on nature crimes investigation," said Lt. Ponting.

"In association with the ASEAN-WEN support project, Wildlife Alliance is working through support and sponsorship of USAID that stated "To combat the illegal wildlife trade effectively, law enforcement agencies must be trained to match the tactics of the wildlife crime offenders. We must form a global network of police, customs, and environmental management agencies to eliminate large-scale wildlife crime," said Karnow. "California was recognized for contributions it had to offer in wildlife protection, professionalism, and state-of-the-art law enforcement tactics when two California Game Wardens were sent to this country to lead the 2-week training event. Because of California's known bio-diversity of wildlife and habitats, and the nexus of illegal sales of wildlife parts between Southeast Asia and ports in Los Angeles and San Francisco, California was specifically requested to help lead the charge, and first of any known state conservation agency ever in the nation."



Sponsored by the ASEAN-WEN Project (Association of Southeast Asian Nation's Wildlife Enforcement Network), an integrated network of law enforcement agencies gathered in Cambodia to receive instruction from DFG SOU specialists and game wardens Lt. Kathy Ponting and John Nores in the investigation of wildlife crimes. Participating agencies included customs, police, prosecutors, specialized governmental wildlife law enforcement organizations and other agencies that work to prevent the illicit hunting, harvesting and transnational trade of rare and endangered species of animals and plants.

Wildlife crime scene investigation yields huge crimes and arrests of mafia-level organizations from Asia and Russia. Due to the lack of enforcement these organizations have found fertile ground in poaching California's natural resources.

Unless DFG is able to bring down an entire organization in a sting operation, crime scenes many times reveal what has already happened. In these cases it is necessary for the department to put as much law enforcement and resources into forensic and crime scene research as possible without allowing other areas of the state to go without protection. This is often hard to do when resources have to be drawn from other counties to perform the type of operations that the SOU must have for the safety of all involved.

"Right now there is huge money in abalone and white sturgeon caviar because those species are slow growing and fragile and it takes them a long time to reach maturity and reproduce," said Lt. Ponting. "The caviar is a delicacy bound for Eastern Europe most of the time, and the north coast of California holds one of the last populations of red abalone in the world. They were in Australia and Africa, but since they allowed commercial fishing of these species, they were decimated. The prices on the black market are huge."

That statement was made during a surveillance operation that was being conducted on sturgeon poachers more than two years ago. Since then poaching has been on the rise and is costing the state even more in natural resource losses.



"As wardens we hear that legislators recognize there is a problem with the understaffing of Fish and Game as well as low wages and damage to the environment and wildlife in California," said retired DFG game warden Jake Bushey of the Burney District. "The fisheries and wildlife cannot be protected by a handful of wardens. The problem has been going on for 30 years, and it would be wonderful if this could be Governor Schwarzenegger's legacy. He could say 'I'm the guy that fixed it; I'm the guy that protected the wildlife and natural resources for future generations to enjoy.'"

Bushey remembers when he tested for Fish and Game in Shasta County there were approximately 400 people in the auditorium to test for Fish and Game. In 2008 he said there was only 11 people testing in all of Northern California. Bushey said that within the first six months of last year's new hires four out of the ten people hired quit because they thought it too dangerous for what DFG is paying.



Wardens encounter many types of weapons including firearms when doing their job, which is for the most part alone.

Game Wardens have one of the most hazardous law enforcement jobs in California

All game wardens will encounter weapons and drug activity of some sort while on patrol simply due to the nature of a job that requires travel in areas that are generally off the grid and hidden from plain sight. Most game wardens will be alone without close back up. From guns and knives during inland hunting, fishing and with the growing popularity of poaching, the ocean patrols often combine an unstable landscape with the danger of even more unique weapons such as gaffs, poles, knives, and all types of firearms.

"At one time you could go down onto the Klamath and see salmon jumping out of the water. It was a very impressive sight, but that hasn't been the case for a long time. Now there is a problem with salmon on the Klamath and in the ocean because of low populations," he said. "Fishing adult salmon is illegal and there is only a limited sport season." Retired DFG game warden Jake Bushey, Burney.

"To illustrate as a chilling reminder of the dangerous work game wardens are exposed to, there were two officer involved shootings in 2008 and one in 2007 in which a gun fire exchange left one suspect dead," said Karnow. "In 2005 a warden was shot in a gun battle killing one of two suspects and another officer involved shooting in 2005 left another suspect dead. In 2003 a warden saved the life of a CHP officer while firing upon and disabling a suspect. Sixteen California game wardens have been killed in the line of duty, half from gunfire."

In most cases whether on land or water, poachers and many commercial outfits have had previous violations in poaching and over-harvesting resources as well as weapons and drug charges to possession, cultivation and transportation of illegal drugs. The danger is then compounded with a lack of support to adequately manage the resources such as salmon, a species whose survival is in question.

Photo courtesy US Coast Guard



On November 7, 2007 the cargo ship, Cosco Busan hit the Bay Bridge at approximately 8:30 am on its way to the Golden Gate that spilled 53,000 gallons of fuel in to the San Francisco Bay. The spill created untold damages and recovery efforts by OSPR of vital wildlife and habitat that the bay supports.

Besides poaching there is hazardous material and oil spills in Northern California's San Francisco Bay Area that goes unchecked because of a lack of manpower. This part of the state supports the greater part of the salmon fishing industry and even more severely north of Sacramento. The San Francisco Bay is the entrance to the majority of tributaries through the Sacramento Delta system that lead to critical salmon spawning areas. Now with a moratorium on commercial salmon fishing there is an even greater need for law enforcement protection of this vital resource.

In 2007 the Cosco Busan cargo ship hit a support passing under the San Francisco Bay Bridge spilling 53,000 gallons of fuel into the bay, destroying habitat including injuring and killing wildlife. DFG Office of Spill Prevention Response (OSPR) received "overwhelming response from the public to assist with the care of the oiled birds from Cosco Busan oil spill".

Photo courtesy Mother Jones



Aerial view of Cosco Busan Oil Spill on November 7, 2007

Undermanned department means unprotected resources for Californians

CFGWA believes they would need 200 game wardens for oil spills, 200 game wardens on bear poaching cases, 200 game wardens on abalone poaching, 200 more on sturgeon poaching and 200 on salmon poaching," said CFGWA representative Jerry Karnow. "To effectively recruit and retain officers DFG needs to be able to offer a comparable wage to have ability to appropriately attract game wardens to fill positions."

Assemblyman Jared Huffman of the Budget Subcommittee in May of 2007 showed his strong support of field game wardens protection of California's resources and wildlife in the letter of support declaring DFG game wardens as "highly educated and trained law enforcement who focus their efforts on illegal activities that adversely affect the state's wildlife and natural resources."

In trying to persuade the legislature to increase funding for salary parity for game wardens, Huffman also mentioned that "the underground trade in wildlife flourishes in California: specifically abalone and sturgeon are illegally captured and sold without ever leaving California borders." And in a pointed reminder to the newly developed MLPA's by the administration, Huffman stated in the letter, "The state must have the resources to effectively recruit, retain and compensate the DFG Wardens necessary to implement this new MLPA program. For nearly 15 years the DFG has sought to bring the salaries of its law enforcement officers into parity with salaries for the comparable law enforcement positions...California's reduced Game Warden force has had a direct negative impact upon our fisheries, wildlife, water quality, public safety and a healthy outdoor heritage." Eleven assembly members that represent specific districts adjacent to the Pacific Ocean signed the letter.

One of the biggest problems hampering efforts for game warden recruitment has been the wardens parent union CAUSE/CSLEA. "We have not seen where our parent union has done anything the past several years to try and increase the number of game wardens in California even though we are dead last in staffing per capita in North America. Our parent union has hung us out to dry and is actually impeding the CFGWA efforts to try to increase our warden staff levels," said CFGWA representative Bob Orange. "They have kicked the CFGWA representative off their board of directors and sued to seize our Warden Association members dues funding. They have prohibited game wardens from working with our constituents and supporters on problems, this includes but is not limited to, National Rifle Association, Sierra Club, Mule Deer Foundation, Trout Unlimited, Safari Club International, Natural Resources Defense Council, Ducks Unlimited, and Act For Animals amongst many others."

Without legislative support and support from the governor, DFG enforcement could be decimated and the resources of California at risk of damage and depletion. "Although our parent union has kicked out the CFGWA they still take nearly \$200,000 a year in dues from 200 officers. They have not met with our DFG Director, Chief of Patrol, Resources Secretary to go over issues and concerns. The union also would not endorse Senate Bill 695, which would have given Wardens pay parity with other like enforcement officers," said Orange.

"There is a simple fix to increase Warden staffing and start adequately protecting the states natural resources again," said Orange. "This is to allow the few Game Wardens of this state to belong in a bargaining union comprised solely of other state peace officers such as Peace Officers of California. Currently we are in a union in which the vast majority are non-sworn personnel where our Association is shunned. If we were allowed to be in a sworn officer only union along with the other state peace officers it would unequivocally solve our problems. We are the state's oldest law enforcement officers with Wardens being around since 1871. This would be the long term solution if Governor Schwarzenegger's Administration would support it".

A look at a bleak future for California wildlife, natural resources and water quality

Unless this problem is resolved quickly and warden numbers are increased significantly further damage to state resources will occur when the general public and even those from other states get news that California may again be reducing the size of the game warden force rather than increasing it. These valuable California assets will come under attack by poachers and reach unprecedented levels of illegal transportation and sales of wildlife and resources not to mention destroying populations of species at risk. The state's resources will be at the mercy of black

marketers in bear parts, salmon, crab and lobster, abalone and sturgeon, bald eagles and any other wildlife illegal to take or hunt.

The state is at a critical point in terms of wildlife protection especially for natural resources issues that have been monopolized by a highly caustic and dramatic debate concerning water rights and water quality all across the state of California. The Natural Resources agency released information that if the projected 70 percent of normal runoff average is reached it will be the 10th driest 3-year period on record if the climate remains dry.

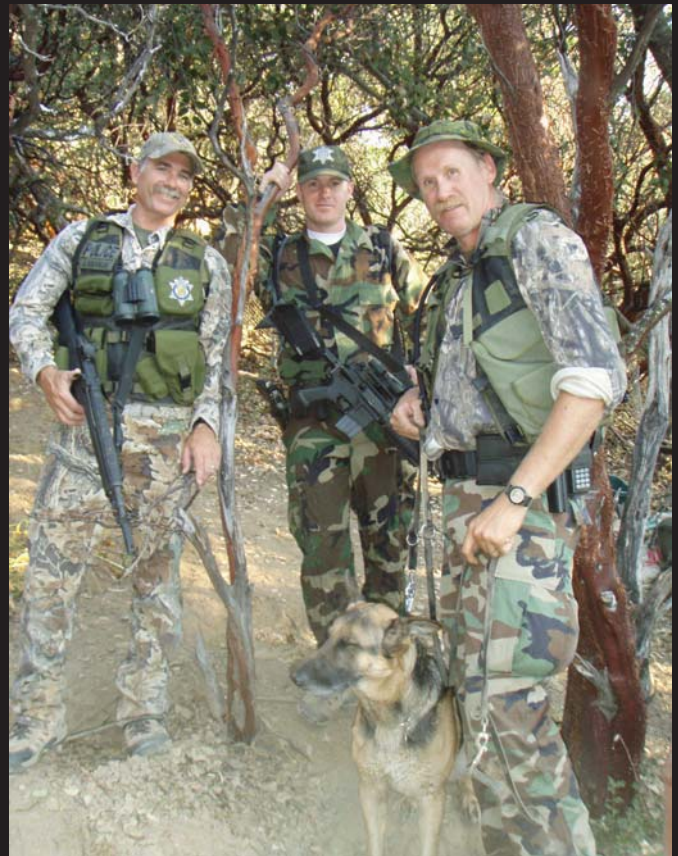
As part of their duties for Department of Homeland Security (DHS) "(Game) Wardens patrol the California Aqueduct, All American Canal, Coachella Canal and other water delivery systems as a routine part of patrol," said Orange. "No other law enforcement agency does that. We routinely patrol dams and power plants, as it is a regular part of the beat. Fishermen fish at powerhouses and wardens do long term surveillances at dams and power plants as a matter of routine. They would quickly notice anything different in a moment." "I've received training from FBI agents themselves on homeland security and eco-terrorism. We receive routine alerts and bulletins from the office of homeland security and FBI through emails.

In addition to the damage that will occur to wildlife and water supplies, on April 21 the state voted to close the 2009 recreational salmon season for a second year, while commercial fishing still is experiencing a moratorium. DFG determined the loss to be \$279 million and 2,690 California jobs.

California has a great deal to protect and protection has to be paramount to the California Legislature and to the citizens of the state. In a February 2006 story in National Geographic titled "California's Wild Crusade" by Virginia Morell it states that California is "one of only five (geographical areas globally) with a Mediterranean climate of hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters" and supports 3,488 native plant species 60 percent of which can only be found in California.

The black market is currently making hundreds of millions of dollars selling California's resources as they dwindle before the residents of a state that only three years ago was rated as "one of the 34 hotspots of biodiversity" globally by Conservation International. That rating can change quickly and irrevocably for many species if game warden numbers stay stagnant or possibly decline. SOU leader Lt. Ponting believes that DFG enforcement has "run silent and deep so many years", because game wardens do what they do because they love the job and what it stands for. "We don't need glory or recognition," said Lt. Ponting. "We have dedication, experience and talent, but we're lacking in numbers. The public and legislators need to know what we're about and what we're trying to do."

DFG Wardens on the P/B Thresher working with U.S. Coast Guard on a lifesaving mission while on lone patrol of MPA's



California State Park Rangers and Game Wardens working side by side with the Nevada County Narcotics Task Force investigating and eradicating a large Mexican National dope garden adjacent to the South Yuba State Park. Illegal pesticides and fertilizers, including deer repellent, found on site.



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