



GEORGIA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION

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Statement of Major Stephen Adams

Congressional Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on Government Operations

Historic Haywood County Courthouse, Waynesville North Carolina

Major Stephen Adams is a 22 year veteran of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. He has served in various roles with the agency including: Wildlife Technician, Conservation Ranger, Sergeant / Field Supervisor, and Captain / Region Supervisor of the Coastal Region. Currently, Adams serves as a member of the Law Enforcement Division Command Staff at the rank of Major, supervising Special Operations programs including the Investigative Unit on statewide level. Major Adams earned a Wildlife Degree from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, has been a P.O.S.T. Certified Peace Officer for 20 years, holds a P.O.S.T. Instructor Certificate and Firearms Instructor certificate, is a graduate of the 28th Georgia Law Enforcement Command College, a past president of the Georgia Peace Officers Association, a graduate of the 246th Session of the FBI National Academy, a member of the National Association of Conservation Law Enforcement Chiefs Leadership Academy 2nd Cohort Group, a member of the Georgia Peace Officers and Standards Training Council Executive Committee, and chairman of the P.O.S.T. Council Training and Certification Committee.

The Department of Natural Resources supports legal hunting under fair chase conditions. The agency is charged with managing wildlife populations under the public trust doctrine for all citizens of Georgia. Law enforcement is a critical component in ensuring that wildlife populations are conserved for present and future generations.

Today, Major Adams will discuss the role and scope of involvement of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources in the multi-state, multi-agency "Operation Something Bruin."

In 2009, the Law Enforcement Investigative Unit of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources was contacted by the US Forest Service and requested to participate in an undercover operation that would target unknown individuals believed to be participating in illegal hunting activities in remote areas of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Illegal bear hunting, illegal guiding on federal property, hunting out of season and in closed areas, illegal sale of black bears

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and parts, and Lacey Act violations were all types of violations that were thought to be occurring in this region based on citizen complaints and fragmented information given to officers over several years. Additionally, hunters had begun to use advanced radios, GPS devices and electronic tracking systems, making enforcement and documentation of violations more difficult. Research previously conducted show that less than 10% of witnessed wildlife crimes are reported, further hampering enforcement efforts. Georgia agreed to participate in the operation by furnishing one trained officer during hunting season for the duration of the operation. The US Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as the US Forest Service agreed to provide the needed supervisory structure, support agents and UC agents. It was also decided that the undercover portion of the operation would last no more than 3 years. Supervisors with Georgia DNR maintained contact with the undercover officer from Georgia while he was detached to the operation. Authority for the operation and officers came under a long standing Memorandum of Agreement between the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and US Fish and Wildlife Service that was last updated in 2006.

During the operation there were two black bears that were taken in Georgia. These two were taken by an undercover officer in 2011. Each of the harvests were made while the officer was in role as a hunter being guided, on duty as an official act. In addition, both instances were thoroughly documented in writing in a Report of Investigation (ROI) and reported as soon as practical to operation supervision. During the 2011 hunting season Georgia DNR records show 690 bears harvested by hunters in Georgia with 529 of the 690 harvested from the mountain bear population.

During the 2013 hunting season, agencies that were participating in Operation Something Bruin made the decision to end all covert operations and begin the closeout phase of the operation. Beginning in December 2013 and continuing until February 2014 when the initial arrest warrants were served, several tasks were completed by Georgia DNR Officers and supervisors that provided multiple layers of oversight on all charges taken by Georgia DNR. A small number of supervisors who were not aware of the operation were briefed on the operation and directed to review all Reports of Investigation that involved state charges that occurred in Georgia over the course of the operation. Their charge was to review the ROI's, to list out all possible violations, to review all possible violations to ensure they were in compliance with the GA DNR LE Law Enforcement Concepts Policy, and to confirm all elements of the crime were met and that they were not duplicative charges or minor administrative infractions.

After the initial list of possible charges were reduced to a list that met the previously stated criteria, supervisors with Georgia DNR LED met with prosecutors in each judicial circuit where charges were being made and briefed as well as received approval to move forward and an intent to prosecute the defendants on the crimes outlined in the briefings. After the briefings were held, officers secured arrest warrants that were signed by judges for each defendant and each charge.

In addition, a media plan was coordinated to highlight the operation in an attempt to deter other violations. The media plan was to give an overview of the operation and discuss the number and

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types of charges that were made. This number continued to decrease as the charges went through the previously mentioned vetting and oversight process.

On the first day of the takedown phase, Georgia officers, along with LE officers from the USFS and USFWS made contact with three suspects identified during the operation. Walt Stancil, Cale Stancil, and Jerry Parker were all contacted at their residences during the early afternoon hours of the first day. All were given copies of the Search and Arrest Warrants and the state charges and the search process was explained to each by a Georgia DNR officer. Georgia DNR has issued and required the use of body worn recording devices since 2007. The encounters during the takedown phase of all Georgia defendants were recorded using these devices, and these recordings have been submitted to the committee as requested. Each video reviewed of these encounters depicts professional, polite and courteous officers who complete their jobs but treat both the defendants and their personal property with respect. Major Adams was at Walt Stancil's residence for a period of time during his arrest and the search of his residence when his attorney, Allyn Stockton came to the residence. He was allowed to speak privately with Walt Stancil. While still at the residence, Allyn Stockton commented to Walt Stancil in the presence of Major Adams and other officers that he appreciated how we were conducting the arrests and searches and the Stancils should be thankful that we were being respectful of them and their belongings. He said he had never seen a search warrant executed that way and officers normally dump belongings on the ground and have little respect for personal property. Major Adams told him that was not how the agency did things, and what he saw was typical from our officers.

The remaining search and arrest warrants for the defendants in Georgia were executed over the next two days without incident.

Major Stephen Adams
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