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California Couple Sentenced for Trafficking Lion Teeth, Tiger Pelt, and Rhino Horn

EUGENE, Ore.— Linh Luu and Kevin Le, a husband and wife from Anaheim, California, pleaded guilty today in federal court in Eugene, Oregon, to violating the Lacey Act. The court sentenced them to three years' probation and a \$10,000 fine each for their roles in trafficking wildlife between Oregon and Vietnam.



Photo of tiger pelt trafficked by defendants, from sentencing memo in case number 26-cr-00297 in U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon.

According to court documents and statements made in court, Luu and Le admitted that between September 2019 and May 2021, they processed \$51,100 in payments to help an individual in Vietnam illegally move wildlife items to and from Oregon. The trafficked items included American black bear gallbladders and cougar bones, which were shipped to Vietnam; and lion teeth, segments of black rhinoceros and white rhinoceros horns, and a tiger pelt, all of which were imported into Oregon.

According to court documents, Luu and Le met an undercover federal agent in December 2020 in a parking lot. They accepted \$12,000 in cash as a down payment for part of a rhino horn and discussed methods to avoid U.S. banking regulations designed to detect illicit transactions. They later each received nearly \$5,000 in electronic payments for the horn segment, which was shipped to Oregon disguised as a household decoration. The sale was discussed as a way to build trust for future, larger deals.



Lion teeth trafficked by the defendants to Oregon, from sentencing memo in case number 26-cr-00297 in U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon.

“Wildlife trafficking threatens some of the world’s most vulnerable species and fuels criminal networks that profit from their destruction,” said **Scott Bradford, U.S. Attorney for the District of Oregon**. “This case demonstrates that our office will hold accountable not only the poachers, but also the financial facilitators who keep these markets alive. We are committed to working with our federal and state partners to disrupt these networks and protect endangered wildlife for future generations.”

“This investigation clearly illustrates that wildlife trafficking isn’t a victimless, white-collar crime. It’s the financial engine behind the slaughter of species like rhinos, tigers, and black bears,” said **Doug Ault, Assistant Director, Office of Law Enforcement, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**. “Every dollar laundered through wildlife trafficking networks represents real damage that cannot be undone. Poachers take the wildlife, but organizers and financial facilitators make the killing profitable, and the Service and our law enforcement partners will continue pursuing everyone who builds and bankrolls these networks.”

All of the wildlife involved in this case is protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), a treaty signed by the United States, Vietnam, and 183 other governments to regulate commercial trade in species that are or may become extinct. Trade in listed species is prohibited without a permit, which the defendants did not obtain. Black bears and cougars are native to Oregon and are prized by some for use in

traditional Asian medicine. Lions, tigers, and black and white rhinoceroses are also protected under the Endangered Species Act. The Lacey Act, the nation's oldest wildlife trafficking statute, prohibits, among other things, buying or selling wildlife that was illegally imported or exported.



Photo of a part of a rhino horn (left) and the same rhino horn part disguised as a house good to thwart customs (right), from sentencing memo in case number 26-cr-00297 in U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Office of Law Enforcement investigated the case with assistance from Homeland Security Investigations and the Oregon State Police. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney William McLaren and Senior Trial Attorney Ryan Connors of the Environmental Crimes Section of the Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division, with support from Assistant U.S. Attorney Adam Nate.

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