



Department of Justice

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District of Oregon

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BULL TROUT POACHER SENTENCED IN FEDERAL COURT

EUGENE, Ore.—Culver, Oregon resident Thomas R. Campbell, 29, was sentenced in federal court today for the flagrant and repeated poaching of protected and Tribally significant bull trout, announced U.S. Attorney Billy J. Williams.

“One of the most solemn duties of the U.S. Attorney’s office is enforcing the laws for the protection of our threatened wildlife and upholding our special trust relationship with our tribal partners,” said United States Attorney Billy J. Williams. “This case demonstrates our priorities in exercising those duties and holding accountable those who would flagrantly disregard our nation’s laws that protect threatened species.”

“Bull trout are an iconic species of the Pacific Northwest whose populations are suffering from habitat degradation, and are protected by Tribal, State and Federal laws,” said James Ashburner, Special Agent in Charge, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “The defendants in this case caused great harm to the recovery efforts of all of the government and non-government groups who have invested in the recovery of this species. This joint case demonstrates the resolve of Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, Oregon State Police, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in preserving bull trout for future generations. A special thank you goes out to the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Oregon for placing an emphasis on environmental crimes that impact the natural world we all enjoy.”

According to court documents, on multiple occasions in 2017 and 2018, Thomas R. Campbell poached bull trout from the Metolius River, fishing from both U.S. Forest Service lands and while trespassing on the “Eyerly Property,” which was held in trust by the United States for the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. Campbell also encouraged others to do the same.

The Metolius River requires catch-and-release for all species of fish, including bull trout. Although one can legally angle for bull trout on the Metolius River and in Lake Billy Chinook, bull trout are not legal to target elsewhere in Oregon. This makes the Metolius River one of the Oregon’s crown gems of angling.

Campbell targeted, kept, and grossly mishandled bull trout despite admittedly knowing the laws protecting the species and how to properly handle fish to immediately release

unharmed. He also committed these crimes despite numerous warnings from public viewers of his social media boasts about his poaching. Campbell repeatedly posted photos of his bull trout poaching exploits to his social media platforms where he had more than 1,000 followers.

Bull trout are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The species has been depleted by a range of factors, including overfishing. Today, bull trout inhabit less than half of their historic range. Central Oregon's Metolius River helps serve as a prized spawning ground, and it is used to help repopulate other waters where bull trout numbers have dwindled even lower. These magnificent fish are revered by anglers and are a cherished Tribal resource. Poaching represents a lethal threat to their recovery.

On August 13, 2020, Campbell pleaded guilty to three misdemeanor charges contained in the criminal information. These counts charge violations of the Lacey Act, 16 U.S.C. § 3372(a)(1) for knowingly acquiring and transporting bull trout from the Metolius River in the Deschutes National Forest and from Warm Springs' Tribal land.

Robert "Bobby" Brunoe, the General Manager of Natural Resources and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs addressed the sentencing judge on behalf of the Tribes. He discussed the Tribes' sovereignty over the Warm Springs Reservation, the severity of the trespasses by non-members like Campbell, and the cultural importance of bull trout to the Tribes. Mr. Brunoe also discussed his own connection to these fish, recalling his grandmother's subsistence fishing for bull trout when he was a child. He stressed the importance of protecting and restoring bull trout.

U.S. District Court Judge Ann Aiken sentenced Campbell to five years of federal probation and banned him from angling or hunting anywhere in the United States as a condition of probation. In addition, Judge Aiken ordered Campbell to pay a \$6,000 criminal fine to the Lacey Act Reward Fund and \$649.95 in restitution to the Oregon State Police for his destruction of a trail camera designed to catch poachers. Campbell was also ordered to perform 300 hours of community service with a non-profit focused on conservation or with a collaborative relationship with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs.

This case was investigated by the United States Fish and Wildlife Services, Office of Law Enforcement; Oregon State Police, Fish and Wildlife Division; Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Branch of Natural Resources; and the United States Forest Service, Law Enforcement and Investigations. It was prosecuted by Will McLaren and Pam Paaso, Assistant U.S. Attorneys for the District of Oregon.

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