



National Conservation Training Center, Shepherdstown, West Virginia--- Lewis Rather, retired Texas Game Warden with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, has no use for poachers.

“Poaching is very personal to me, it is stealing from every one of you and from me,” he told 42 African conservation officials attending the International Conservation Chief’s Academy (ICCA) to help build relationships and help fight illegal wildlife trafficking.

Following his retirement from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, after 35 years in wildlife law enforcement service, Rather became Executive Director of International Wildlife Crimestoppers, a 501(c) (3) non-profit corporation that helps to stop poaching wherever it occurs. The organization originally began in 1997 in seven states, and now works internationally helping to reduce illegal wildlife trafficking by engaging communities in deterring and apprehending wildlife poachers.

The organization partners with conservation agencies and organizations to support the sustainable use of natural resources, and deter poaching around the world. Its mission is to reduce the illegal take (poaching) of the world’s fish and wildlife resources through the exchange of information with anti-poaching organizations. “We all need to work together against poachers.” Rather said. The major emphasis of the organization is information, education, and apprehension. People can call in with information on violations that then will be passed along to the agency handling enforcement of fish and wildlife laws.

Lieutenant Wayne Saunders, a 22-year veteran of the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department and former president of International Wildlife Crimestoppers, described how important it is for a game warden to develop a network of contacts with local people in the community. “By building a network it allowed me to learn about who the poachers were, and that is essentially what Operation Game Thief does. It helps provide information on poachers,” Saunders said. “It is a network that provides information on poachers, and we want to expand the reach of this network – to a global scale.” Operation Game Thief is an anti-poaching program that can be run in any state. Operation Game Thief works alongside International Wildlife Crimestoppers to provide information that helps game wardens do their jobs effectively. Times have changed and law enforcement needs to also change and adapt, and Saunders said that Operation Game Thief



and International Wildlife Crimestoppers can help to give law enforcement critical, timely and accurate information on wildlife poachers.

Each state has some community-based information-gathering tool to receive information on wildlife violations. Sometimes it is an (800) number, sometimes a telephone tips hotline, or a Facebook page or texting. Sometimes Saunders said that some of the best cases come from information provided by friends or ex-spouses.

Operation Game Thief can be implemented either by a state natural resource department or by a non-profit conservation organization. "We create an effective public relations campaign and pay out cash rewards," Saunders said. "Informants are allowed to remain anonymous."

The amount of the payout depends on several factors, including whether the violator has had a prior conviction, the number of citations issued, the amount of the fine imposed by the courts, what civil restitution is required for the wildlife harvested illegally, and the involvement of the informant.

One of the tools used by the New Hampshire Department is to have a travelling trailer that contains a "Wall of Shame," displaying mounted animals that were taken illegally. The trailer is taken around the state to different events, and often draws the interest of young people.

One of the points of emphasis is youth education. The program specifically reaches out to youth in order to have them understand the importance of wildlife laws, and the harm poachers do to wildlife.

More information on these programs can be found at: [www.wildlifecrimestoppers.org](http://www.wildlifecrimestoppers.org) and [www.operationgamethief.org](http://www.operationgamethief.org).

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