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OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL STATE OF FLORIDA

Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Attorney General James Uthmeier Proposes Enhanced Penalties for Dangerous Poaching Near Florida Homes



Courtesy of the Office of the Attorney General

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General James Uthmeier announced a legislative proposal to create a new standalone felony offense of aggravated illegal taking of wildlife and to significantly enhance penalties when poachers discharge firearms near people, occupied structures, or critical infrastructure.

“Poachers who unlawfully discharge firearms near Florida homes are not just stealing our wildlife but endangering families and neighborhoods,” **said Attorney General James Uthmeier.** “This legislation would give prosecutors a powerful new tool to hold these reckless criminals accountable with second-degree felony charges, permanent loss of hunting privileges, and forfeiture of their weapons. Floridians deserve to feel safe in their communities, and our natural resources must be protected for future generations.”

"Today's announcement of increased penalties for poaching ensures our officers have the resources they need to hold criminals accountable,” **said FWC Executive Director Roger**

Young. “These tougher penalties reinforces Florida's commitment to conserving our wildlife and natural resources for generations to come."

“We are committed to working with our state partners to protect our natural resources and ensure that those who recklessly engage in poaching don’t endanger citizens,” **said Bay County Sheriff Tommy Ford.**

"Florida's fish and wildlife are a shared natural heritage and protecting them requires all of us working together,” **said Florida Land Council Chairman Joshua Kellam.** “Fair and consistent enforcement supports ethical sportsmen and women while helping conserve these resources for future generations. Through strong partnerships, education, and appropriate enforcement, Florida remains committed to combating poaching while protecting our state's natural resources and Floridians' right to hunt and fish.”

Poaching in Florida—the illegal hunting, capturing, killing, or trafficking of fish and wildlife—remains a persistent threat despite strong legal protections and the recovery of some historically over-hunted species. What was once large-scale commercial overharvest that drove species near extinction has evolved into a mix of opportunistic game violations, targeted taking of protected species, and organized trafficking for black markets.

In 2021, Florida added all wildlife crimes to the RICO statute to better address organized operations. Florida’s extensive coastline, vast wetlands, Everglades, and remote waterways make comprehensive enforcement challenging, and law enforcement relies heavily on public tips.

The proposal creates the new offense of aggravated illegal taking of wildlife. A person commits the offense of aggravated illegal taking of wildlife if the person takes, kills, possesses, or attempts to take any wildlife in violation of this chapter or any rule or order of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and knowingly discharges a firearm in furtherance of or to effect such taking, killing, possession, or attempt at taking any wildlife near any person, occupied structure, or critical infrastructure.

In addition to the criminal penalties, the court must order:

- Permanent revocation of all licenses and permits issued under this chapter and permanent ineligibility for any such license or permit; and
- Forfeiture of the firearm employed in the offense and any other equipment, vehicle, or vessel used in the violation, pursuant to the procedures set forth in ss. 379.337 and 379.338, or chapter 932, as applicable.

The proposal would also create a stand-alone third-degree felony for poaching while committing trespass.

The proposal further places criminal violations of Chapter 379 under the jurisdiction of the Statewide Prosecutor to strengthen consistent and aggressive statewide prosecution of these serious crimes.

Law enforcement relies heavily on public tips to catch poachers. Citizens can report suspected violations to the Wildlife Alert Reward Program by calling 888-404-FWCC (or #FWC from a cell phone) or by submitting a tip at MyFWC.com/WildlifeAlert. Tips can be anonymous. If the information results in an arrest or citation, the tipster may be eligible for a reward of up to $1,000.

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