

2 men to serve time, pay fine for bear poaching

Two Northern California men will spend time in jail and pay fines for poaching bears in El Dorado County.

Peter George Vitali, 56, of Pioneer and Arthur Martin Blake, 59, of River Pines, pleaded no contest to misdemeanor charges of illegally taking wildlife for profit. Vitali was fined \$12,500 and Blake \$5,000. Both must serve 30 days in jail, followed by 36 months on probation.

Vitali and Blake were arrested by California Department of Fish and Wildlife officers in April 2013 after they were found to be in possession of 20 large bear claws and three bear gall bladders in the Eldorado National Forest.

“This case is an example of the challenges our officers face,” CDFW Lt. Stacey LaFave said in a statement. “Heavy fines and jail time send a strong message to poachers who unlawfully take and profit from California’s natural resources.”

Officials said the two men killed three bears, likely a sow and two cubs. The claws, liver and gall bladder had been removed from the sow and only the liver and gall bladder were removed from the younger two bears. The bile contained inside bear gall bladders is believed by some to have medicinal properties and is sold on the black market.

California laws forbid the sale, purchase or possession for sale of any bear part.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*