

Penalty Increase

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A FULL YEAR HAS PASSED since the inception of Act 54—the penalty increase legislation that created the first felony offenses in the Game and Wildlife Code, and Act 60—the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact legislation that allows Pennsylvania to engage in reciprocal hunting license privilege revocation with other state members of the compact. At the time of print, these new laws have resulted in almost 100 felony charges filed against wildlife criminals and 259 cases where wildlife criminals lost their hunting privileges not only in Pennsylvania, but also in 41 other states. The new laws also resulted in the longest jail sentence ever issued in Pennsylvania for a wildlife crime—105 days to 1 year and two months. District Attorneys have been very helpful in prosecuting these cases and the Judges have been sentencing criminals effectively, including jail sentences and fines of thousands of dollars.

In addition to these laws, the Board of Commissioners increased the restitution costs for wildlife taken illegally, including restitution values of \$5,000 for trophy class animals. These restitutions have been assessed by the courts in several cases. Wildlife Conservation Officers have been actively enforcing the new laws and focusing on violations that have the most impact on the wildlife resource. Officers detect between 15 and 20 thousand violations of the game law each year, and many others go undetected. Our protection efforts rely heavily on hunters and citizens reporting violations. Cell phones allow people to report violations while in the field, increasing the



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chances of an officer being able to intercept the violator. We received more than 500 TIPs and paid \$6,750 in rewards last year through the **Turn In a Poacher** program—a significant increase from previous years. Participation by the public is vital to our overall success, and we encourage sportsman to program regional office phone numbers into their phones.

Our special investigation unit has gathered intelligence that indicates the combination of the new laws and regulations are creating a deterrent to poaching, which we hope to see realized as a decline in illegal activity in the future. □