

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Ginseng conviction

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

I previously spoke about the arrest and conviction of Johnny Carl Grooms of Cosby, Tennessee for conspiring to distribute oxycodone and cocaine, interstate travel to further drug trafficking, possession of oxycodone with the intent to distribute, distribution of cocaine, possession of firearms by a convicted felon, and illegally trafficking in ginseng. Grooms was recently sentenced, and his crimes earned him more than 24 years in prison.

In September 2009, Drug Enforcement Administration and other law enforcement agents recovered pills, firearms and numerous drug ledgers during the execution of a search warrant. The drug ledgers showed that Grooms trafficked in over 17,000 oxycodone pills.

Grooms was also convicted of conspiring to distribute cocaine. He broke larger quantities of cocaine down into half-gram bags at the Park Entrance Grocery, which he sold for \$50 per bag. In early February 2009, Grooms provided a sample of cocaine to an undercover agent and then sold the agent an ounce of cocaine later that month.

Grooms also delivered multiple pounds of wild ginseng to the undercover agent on four separate occasions in 2009 and 2010. He didn't have a dealer permit nor records of ginseng sales as required by Tennessee state law. Ginseng roots, which had been marked by the National Park Service in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, were also found in the ginseng sold by Grooms. He acknowledged during the recorded conversations that he knew ginseng he was obtaining had been illegally taken from the park.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.