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Former CNET Commander Pleads Guilty To Drug, Robbery And Civil Rights Violations

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 5, 2012

OAKLAND, Calif. – The former Commander of the Central Contra Costa County Narcotics Enforcement Team (CNET) and a Special Agent Supervisor of the California Department of Justice pleaded guilty to five felony counts in federal court in Oakland today, United States Attorney Melinda Haag announced. Norman Wielsch admitted one count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute and to distribute marijuana and 50 grams or more of methamphetamine, one count of theft from programs receiving federal funds, two counts of civil rights conspiracy and one count of Hobbs Act robbery.

In pleading guilty to the charges, Wielsch, 51, admitted to stealing from evidence facilities \$30,000 to \$70,000 worth of marijuana and methamphetamine that had been seized during legitimate CNET raids. Specifically, Wielsch admitted that he stole at least twenty pounds of marijuana and more than 400 grams of high-purity methamphetamine (ice) between November 2010 and February 2011. He further admitted to conspiring to distribute these drugs with his codefendant, private investigator and former Antioch police officer Christopher Butler, also 51.

In pleading to the civil rights conspiracies, Wielsch admitted that he and Butler participated together in a phony "sting" operation in which they falsely detained a young man under the guise of a legitimate law enforcement operation, conducted warrantless searches and kept narcotics that were taken during the sting. Wielsch also admitted that he and Butler staged what purported to be legitimate sting operations against prostitutes but instead of seizing evidence and citing the prostitutes, they unlawfully took the prostitutes' money and property for themselves. Wielsch acknowledged that they took more than \$10,000 from individuals in the course of their prostitution robberies.

After entering his guilty plea, Wielsch was remanded to the custody of the U.S. Marshals. Wielsch's sentencing is scheduled for Feb. 19, 2013, at 10 a.m. before Judge Sandra Brown Armstrong in Oakland.

Wielsch and Butler were indicted by a federal Grand Jury on Aug. 9, 2011. Butler pleaded guilty on May 4, 2012, to a superseding information charging the same narcotics conspiracy, theft from programs receiving federal funds, two civil rights conspiracies and robbery counts to which Wielsch pleaded guilty, as well as extortion under color of official right and illegal wiretapping. On Sept. 25, 2012, Butler was sentenced to 96 months in prison and a \$20,000 fine, receiving a sentencing reduction for his cooperation with law enforcement in this and other investigations.

The maximum statutory penalty for conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute and to distribute marijuana and 50 grams or more of methamphetamine is life in prison with a ten-year mandatory minimum and a \$10 million fine. The maximum statutory penalty for theft from programs receiving federal funds and conspiracy against rights is ten years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. The maximum statutory penalty for Hobbs Act robbery is 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. However, any sentence would be imposed by the court after consideration of the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and the federal statute governing the imposition of a sentence, 18 U.S.C. § 3553.

Hartley M. K. West is the Assistant U.S. Attorney who is prosecuting the case with the assistance of Rania Ghawi and Alycee Lane. The prosecution is the result of a lengthy investigation by the FBI with the assistance of the Contra Costa County District Attorney's Office.

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