

# COLORADO PARKS & WILDLIFE

## Operation Game Thief

### What is it?

Operation Game Thief is a Colorado Parks and Wildlife program that pays rewards to citizens who turn in poachers. You can call us toll-free within Colorado at 1-877-COLO-OGT, Verizon cell phone users can dial #OGT, or contact us via e-mail at [game.thief@state.co.us](mailto:game.thief@state.co.us).

Callers do not have to reveal their names or testify in court. A reward of \$500 is offered for information on cases involving big game or endangered species, while \$250 is offered for information on turkey and \$100 for fishing and small game cases. A Citizens Committee administers the reward fund, which is maintained by private contributions. The Board may approve rewards of up to \$1,000 for flagrant cases. Rewards are paid for information that leads to an arrest or a citation being issued.

### Why do we have it?

In the entire state of Colorado there are only 122 District Wildlife Managers - so, wildlife needs your eyes and ears to report known or suspected violations. Poaching is a serious and costly crime. It robs legitimate sportsmen of game and fish, robs businesses and taxpayers of revenues generated by hunting and fishing, and robs all of us of a valuable natural resource: our wildlife. Operation Game Thief is strong stuff, but the crime of poaching is serious enough to merit it.

### Who are the poachers?

Poaching is surrounded by romantic myths that just aren't true. Poachers are not poor people trying to feed their families. In fact, putting food on the table is one of the least common motives for poaching. Poachers kill for the thrill of killing, to lash out at wildlife laws, or for profit. They kill wildlife anyway, time and place they can. Poaching rings can be well organized and extremely profitable. In a nutshell, poachers are criminals and should be dealt with as such.

### How the Program Works

- Calls on the Operation Game Thief hotline (toll-free within Colorado at 1-877-COLO-OGT or Verizon cell phone users can dial #OGT), or via e-mail: [game.thief@state.co.us](mailto:game.thief@state.co.us) - are taken in the Denver CPW headquarters. All information about the poaching incident is taken and the caller is assigned a code number

- The information is evaluated by the law enforcement personnel. Investigations begin immediately and must follow the same rules and constitutional guidelines as any law enforcement investigation.
- If a poacher is arrested or issued a citation on the basis of information provided by a caller, a reward is authorized.
- Rewards can be paid in cash and the pay-off is arranged to protect the anonymity of the caller.
- Rewards will be paid only if the informant states that a reward is desired prior to any investigation.

Actually, most wildlife enthusiasts don't want a reward -- they just want the criminals stopped!

### **Please Help Stop Poaching**

You can help stop poaching. If you see a poaching incident, report it. Look at it this way: if you saw someone breaking into your neighbor's house, would you just stand by and watch? Of course not; you would report it. Poaching is a crime against you, your neighbor, and everyone else in the state of Colorado. Call 1-877-COLO-OGT toll-free or Verizon cell phone users can simply dial #OGT. If you'd prefer, you can e-mail us at [game.thief@state.co.us](mailto:game.thief@state.co.us).

### **Is Poaching significant?**

Yes. While the exact figures are unknown, studies indicate poachers may kill almost as many animals and fish as legitimate hunters take during legal seasons. If poachers kill even half that number each year, the problem is serious. Poachers do not confine their killing only to game animals. Threatened, endangered and nongame wildlife show up in the poacher's bag as well.

### **Does this approach work?**

Yes. Operation Game Thief was pioneered by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and has been adopted by 49 of the 50 states, including Colorado. Since 1981, Colorado's Operation Game Thief has received more than 2,400 reports of poaching, resulting in more than 700 convictions. These convictions have netted over \$600,000 in fines and have resulted in the seizure of more than 1,300 illegally taken animals. Almost \$130,000 in rewards have been paid to citizens who reported suspected illegal activity.

## What to look for

Poaching is the illegal taking or possession of any game, fish or nongame wildlife. Obvious signs of poaching include hunting out of season, hunting at night using spotlights, and taking more than the legal limit. The purchase of resident licenses by non-residents constitutes another violation that impacts wildlife management.

Provide as much information as you can. Essential information includes:

- The violation date and time
- Location of the incident (as exact as possible)
- A description of the violation: number of shots heard, type of weapon, etc.  
The number of suspects
- Names and/or identifying features such as age, height, hair color, clothes, etc.
- Vehicle description including type, year, color and license number
- If you know how a poached animal is being transported, or where it is being stored, tell us.
- Include any other information you think may be pertinent to the case.

Remember, try to get the information to us as soon as possible. Any delay may mean we can't catch the bad guys!

## You can also help by contributing

You can also help by contributing to the reward fund that makes the program possible. Make checks out to Operation Game Thief and send your tax-deductible contribution to: Operation Game Thief, c/o Parks and Wildlife, 6060 Broadway, Denver, CO 80216. Remember, the reward fund depends on your contributions. With your help, something can and will be done about poaching.

People who turn in poachers may receive preference points or even licenses in some cases. Find out more from the [Turn in Poachers \(TIP\) program](#).

Help Stop Poaching!

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