

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release February 5, 1981

Inez Connor 202/343-5634
George Sura 907/276-3800

FWS AGENTS CARRY OUT FIVE-STATE INVESTIGATION OF ILLEGAL TRADE IN WALRUS IVORY

In one of the largest law enforcement operations ever conducted by the agency, 80 law enforcement officers from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) carried out searches yesterday in Alaska and four other States as part of an investigation into illegal traffic in walrus ivory.

FWS agents reported seizing a total of 10,000 pounds of fresh, raw walrus ivory estimated to be worth about \$450,000 wholesale. Officials said all of the tusks and parts came from Alaska.

FWS Regional Director Keith Schreiner said search warrants were executed by 50 agents in Alaska and 30 others in the States of Washington, California, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. The searches followed 11 months of undercover investigation.

The investigation concerned persons linked in commercial interstate activities and others apparently acting independently of any known organized network. Two dealers outside of Alaska were reportedly doing an estimated \$3.5 million annually in ivory trade.

The cases have been referred to the respective U.S. Attorney offices, and officials in the wildlife section at the Department of Justice also are reviewing them.

Search warrants were executed in Anchorage, Dillingham, Fairbanks, Girdwood, Nome, and Skagway, Alaska; Seattle and Bellingham, Washington; Ben Lomond, California; Taunton, Massachusetts; and Asbury Park, New Jersey.