

WHALE SKULL

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Fisheries and Wildlife, who made the initial discovery of Pronk's sale, and Special Agent Todd Nickerson of the National Marine Fisheries Service within the National Oceanographic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Sgt. Belanger said Pronk could be charged with illegal possession of marine mammal parts, a violation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 and the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

If convicted of knowingly possessing the whale skull, Pronk could get up to a year in jail and/or a fine up to \$20,000. Even unknowing possession of the whale skull could bring a fine of \$10,000, Sgt.

Belanger said.

"It is illegal to possess whale parts if there is no permit if it's after 1972, and it's certainly after 1972, and there is certainly to be no selling, bartering, or exchanging, and the reason being is there would be a market created for those parts," said Sgt. Belanger, who added that it appears that Pronk did not knowingly haul the whale skull to the surface. "From what I understand, he brought it up in his lobster line or his trap line; it got entangled."

For his part, Pronk said he was unaware that keeping and not reporting the humpback whale skull was illegal. He hauled up the skull with the winch on his lobster boat about 100 yards west of Muskeget Island with the warp of his lobster gear entangled in one of the skull's eye sockets.

Pronk described the skull as bone white, about five feet across and around seven feet long, and remarked that it did not stink at all, theorizing that it had been tumbling around on the bottom for quite some time. Nickerson, who is handling the investigation for National Marine Fisheries, could not say whether it died during Nantucket's whaling era or in the recent past.

After realizing that it was a whale skull, Pronk hauled it aboard. Back in Madaket Harbor, he quickly got an offer from a man on the pier. Pronk gladly accepted \$2,500 for his sea treasure, given the time of year and his lack of knowledge about the significance of his catch.

"Upon coming in from lobstering, there were a

couple of people hanging around the pier, and this man who said he knew a woman in Madaket who would buy it, asked me if I wanted to sell it, and it being a month-and-a-half before Christmas, and me not knowing it was illegal, of course I sold it," said Pronk. "If I had known it was illegal, I certainly would have returned the thing to the water."

Several days later, Pronk said he learned of the severity of his transgression and called the woman he sold the skull to to see if he could buy it back and make things right. But, according to Pronk, the buyers, who he described as prominent Nantucketers with an extensive collection of whale bones both inside and outside their house, would not give up the skull. Pronk said he could not disclose to *The Nantucket Independent* to whom he sold the skull.

When he is done with his investigation, Nickerson will turn his evidence and information over to National Marine Fisheries Service lawyers. He said he is skeptical of Pronk's assertion that he did not know keeping whale parts was illegal.

"The reason why this case has made it as far as it did is we had knowledge that the fisherman knew the transaction was not legal," said Nickerson.

Pronk said it is easy for him or any Nantucketer to believe that possessing whale parts is not a crime, as many islanders display whale bones on their property.

"You look around this island and people have whale bones hanging from their houses; they're all over the place." ■

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SHOOTING RANGE

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ation signed a lease with the town on Dec. 11, 2006 for the use of the property.

And with the hunting association's filing last spring for a Board of Appeals special permit to formalize their use of the northern portion of the property as a shooting range, the opportunity for the neighborhood Wigwam Association to silence or at least curtail the shooting range, arrived.

In Dec. 5 letters to the ZBA, island attorney Kevin Dale, who represents the Russell's Way/Wigwam Road Maintenance Trust, provided the board with a noise study done by Cavanaugh Tocci Associates, Inc. of Sudbury, Mass., stating that the shooting range's noise levels measured in decibels would exceed the town's limit of 63 decibels as well as the state's Department of Environmental Protection's maximum level of 50 to 55 decibels 2,500 feet from the Wigwam Road residential area.

Dale also cited other concerns from his clients in one of his letters.

"Permitting a shooting range in a rural and relatively undeveloped residential area is not in harmony with the intent and purpose of the Nantucket Zoning By-Law," Dale noted in his letter to the ZBA on behalf of Michael and Marisol Cohen of 33 and 35 Wigwam Road, the closest residents to the shooting range. "The noise and disruption produced by the proposed shooting range will be substantially more detrimental to the Wigwam Road neighborhood than the existing use of this undeveloped and vacant Town property. Any prior use of this Town property for a shooting range was impermissible and illegal, and it establishes no precedent for the proposed range."

For the Nantucket Hunting Association, which would eventually like to build some sort of building on the property, these claims are unfounded. Hunting asso-

ciation attorney Alison Sweet Zieff said that gunshot noise, if any is audible to residents in the area at all, would largely be drowned out by arriving and departing air traffic at the nearby Nantucket Memorial Airport, according to a study of NHA's shooting range proposal done by Thalheimer Associates of Natick, Mass., which determined that noise levels would "easily comply with the Nantucket Noise Bylaw."

Zieff argues that the location, and its long history of shooting range activities, makes it the ideal spot for the proposed shooting range.

All three ranges — archery, skeet and handgun and rifle target shooting — are pointed north-northwest away from any houses. Target and skeet shooters will be firing into the old railroad bed traversing the northern portion of the property from a depression 24.5 feet below the grade of Milestone Road. Russell's Way and Wigwam Road are at similar grades, Zieff said, and for someone to fire in that direction, they would need to turn 154 degrees, and hike out of the low spot and away from the shooting area.

"I think we addressed all of that," said Zieff. "If there is shooting going on, there will be a range safety officer there. The whole idea was to take what was already going on there and make it safe."

Zieff added that the hunting association intends to close off all other access to the property and hopes to share a roadway with the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8608. The shooting range would also serve Nantucket's law enforcement personnel and be used for hunter education courses. A building for the Nantucket Hunting Association is not planned in the immediate future.

"Down the road, they want to do a clubhouse," said Zieff. "Once they get their permitting, they can apply for grants to improve the site and at some point, do a clubhouse."

The ZBA will hear the NHA's proposal at its Jan. 11 meeting at 1 p.m. at 2 Fairgrounds Road. ■

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NEW CHURCH

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Community Outreach Tabernacle, Kerr was persuaded to help them put together their worship team. In the process, he came to Nantucket with a friend to speak at the interdenominational Nantucket Worship Center.

That December, after returning to Jamaica for a brief stay, Rev. Kerr decided to move to Nantucket and came here in February 2002. The next month he opened New Life Ministries International, which

meets at Bennett Hall on Sundays and holds mid-week services at St. Paul's Church. New Life Ministries' congregation on Nantucket is predominantly Jamaican, but includes some Americans, British, Salvadorans and people from the Caribbean.

Rev. Kerr does not yet have a date when he wants to break ground for the new church for New Life Ministries International.

"We're not sure about all of the details yet, so it's kind of premature," he said. "We haven't had a date set as to when we want to do that." ■