



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wahpeton Man Tagged with Wide-Ranging Narcotics

Conspiracy and Use of a Firearm

FARGO - United States Attorney Drew H. Wrigley announced today that **Rick Joe Ehlert** of Wahpeton, North Dakota, was found guilty by a 12-person jury on four counts of Federal drug charges.

Ehlert, 39, was found guilty of conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine, marijuana and cocaine, possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute, possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, and use of a firearm during a drug trafficking crime. **Ehlert** faces a minimum mandatory sentence of 17 years' imprisonment and a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. United States District Court Judge Rodney S. Webb presided over the six-day trial.

Testimony at trial estimated more than 15 pounds of methamphetamine and over 100 pounds of marijuana, in addition to cocaine, were distributed by the conspiracy. Retail value of the narcotics would have exceeded \$500,000. During this investigation, approximately two pounds of methamphetamine and 93 pounds of marijuana were seized at a residence in Sanborn, ND, on May 3, 2004.

This case is part of "Operation Speed Racer", a joint investigation by Federal and state law enforcement in North Dakota and Washington to dismantle a drug trafficking organization responsible for distributing to this region, large quantities of methamphetamine, cocaine and marijuana from

Mexico, California and Washington.

Several defendants have been indicted and have pled guilty in this case: Terry Erickson and Brian Johnson, Wahpeton, ND; Andy Mata, and Adrienne Ybarra, Moorhead, MN; and Antonio Sanchez Garibay, Wapeto, Washington. The investigation continues.

The case was investigated by the Drug Enforcement Administration, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation and the Southeast Multi-County Agency Task Force.

Sentencing for **Ehlert** has been scheduled for September 9, 2005 in United States District Court in Fargo, North Dakota.

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