

Dinosaur skull seized in US tied to Mongolia case (Update)

December 3 2012, by Bob Moen

(AP)—A dinosaur skull seized from a Wyoming home is related to an investigation into fossil smuggling from Mongolia, indicating that efforts to stem the illegal trade are making progress, an attorney said Monday.

Robert Painter, a Houston attorney representing Mongolia President Elbegdorj Tsakhia, said officials hoped that such seizures will have a chilling effect on smuggling.

"It's really part of what we hoped that would happen ... there would be increased awareness across the country of Mongolian law and the U.S. government is cooperating in protecting these cultural treasures," Painter said.

He predicted there will be more such cases as word gets out about the illegal sale of Mongolian dinosaur bones.

Louis Martinez, spokesman for the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations in New York, said he couldn't release any details about the Wyoming case because the investigation was ongoing.

However, Martinez confirmed it was related to a case in which a Florida fossils dealer was recently charged with smuggling dinosaur bones, including a *Tyrannosaurus Bataar* skeleton that was seized by the government in June in a civil forfeiture action.

The skeleton was sold at auction for \$1.05 million before being seized by the government.

The government contends the bones were brought into the country illegally from Mongolia, which has laws that declare dinosaur fossils to be the property of the government.

The Tyrannosaurus Bataar was a dinosaur from the late Cretaceous period, about 70 million years ago.

The skull seized in Wyoming came from the same dinosaur species. The Tyrannosaurus Bataar is a close relative of the Tyrannosaurus rex—one of the most well-known dinosaurs that is commonly depicted in movies as a feared, voracious carnivore.

Painter said some people are willing to pay big money on the black market for dinosaur bones and Mongolia is one of the places where many bones were being dug up and transported against the law.

"The Mongolian government has learned that there is really a global marketplace for these illicit fossils and it was really something that was going on on a much larger scale than we were originally aware of," he said.

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