

# Methamphetamine Traffickers Sentenced in Federal Court



April 26, 2012

**Four people have received federal prison terms and another's** sentence is pending as the result of a two-year, multi-agency investigation of a methamphetamine trafficking ring operating in Sweetwater County.

In a joint release issued today, Sweetwater County Sheriff **Rich Haskell and the Division of Criminal Investigation's Southwest** Enforcement Team said Federal District Court Judge Scott W. Skavdahl handed down the sentences on April 13 in Casper.

The DCI Southwest Enforcement Team is a special unit comprised of DCI special agents and investigators from the Sweetwater County **Sheriff's Office, the Green River Police Department, the Uinta County Sheriff's Office, the Evanston Police Department, the Sublette County Sheriff's Office, and the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office.**

Officials said the Team developed information about methamphetamine suppliers in Idaho working with drug dealers in Sweetwater County in 2010 and began building a case against **members of the ring.**

**A traffic stop made by Deputy Sheriff Patrick O'Farrell on November 7, 2010 north of Rock Springs provided the case with an important break when the driver, who first identified himself with an alias, turned out to be Christopher Scott Ayers, wanted by Minidoka County, Idaho authorities for probation violation. A search of Ayers's vehicle turned up methamphetamine, marijuana, cocaine, digital scales, and drug transaction records.**

The continuing investigation ramped up in July of 2011, when Southwest Enforcement Team agents made a key undercover drug buy **and the Sheriff's Office Tactical Response Team arrested Felix Maldonado of Burley, Idaho, Juan Manuel Glaria-Ramirez of Salt Lake City, Utah, and Mexico, and Sheila Anne Russell, also of Burley, Idaho.** Arrested later was Eden resident Steven E. Painovich.

Painovich, 60, was sentenced to 120 months (10 years), followed by five years of supervised release, on one count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute and to distribute and one count of distribution of at least 500 grams but not more than 1.5 kilograms of **methamphetamine. He was also fined \$15,000 and ordered to pay a \$200.00 special assessment fee. In addition, the Court ordered** repayment of CJA Panel fees in the amount not to exceed \$10,000, finding that Painovich failed to disclose substantial assets on his financial affidavit.

Ayers, 33, of Eden, Wyoming, and Burley, Idaho, received a sentence of 151 months (12 years, seven months), followed by five years of supervised release, plus a \$200.00 special assessment for one count of conspiracy to distribute and to distribute methamphetamine and **one count of conspiracy to launder money.**

Glaria-Ramirez, 37, pleaded guilty to charges related to conspiracy to **distribute methamphetamine. His sentence is pending.**

**31-year-old Sheila Russell was sentenced to 168 months (14 years).**

Her charges include one count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute and to distribute methamphetamine, one count of conspiracy to launder money, one count of laundering of monetary instruments and aiding and abetting and one count of possess with intent to distribute methamphetamine and aiding and abetting.

Felix Maldonado, 52, received a sentence of 151 months (12 years, seven months) for one count of distribution of methamphetamine and aiding and abetting, one count of possess with intent to distribute methamphetamine and aiding and abetting and one count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute and to distribute methamphetamine, followed by five years of supervised probation.

Haskell praised the hard work of DCI, the Southwest Enforcement **Team, and his deputies. “This is a prime example of effective law enforcement cooperation and interaction,” he said. “The results speak for themselves.”**