



May 19, 2022

## Brother and Sister Pleads Guilty to Theft for Cutting Down Over 200-Year-Old Black Walnut Tree in Cleveland Metroparks Mill Stream Run Reservation

CLEVELAND - Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Michael C. O'Malley announced yesterday that Todd Jones, 57, and Laurel Hoffman, 54, pleaded guilty and were sentenced for cutting down and selling an over 200-year-old Black Walnut tree in the Cleveland Metroparks Mill Stream Run Reservation in September 2021.

"These siblings purposefully destroyed invaluable park property for their own personal profit, and we cannot allow those destructive actions to occur without consequence," said Prosecutor Michael C. O'Malley. "Our regional park system is our greatest community asset, and we take our duty to protect it very seriously."

Sometime between September 17 and September 23, Todd Jones contracted a tree felling company to remove a Black Walnut tree located over 7 feet from his property line near Royalton Road and Valley Parkway in Strongsville. Jones and his sister, Laurel Hoffman, contracted the company to cut down the tree. They also agreed to sell the company the wood for \$2,000. The wood was then sold to a sawmill in Geauga County.

On September 25, 2021, the Cleveland Metroparks Police Department (CMPD) responded to the scene. An over 200-year-old Black Walnut tree had been felled on the Metroparks property in Strongsville. The surrounding area had also received severe damage including recently planted saplings.

An investigation conducted by CMPD revealed the Black Walnut tree was worth over \$28,000 and the cost to replace the tree and fix the surrounding damage was over \$100,000. In addition, Jones verbally and through writing assured the felling company the tree was located on his property, even though various conditions including a surveyor's stake, recently planted saplings in line with the tree, and a publicly available property search made it readily apparent the tree was located on park property. CMPD referred the matter to the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office.

"The forests of our Emerald Necklace are to be conserved for generations," said Jennifer Grieser, Cleveland Metroparks Director of Natural Resources. "While this more than 200-year-old tree cannot be replaced, thanks to the County Prosecutor's Office the restitution from this case will support tree plantings for the future."

On May 18, 2022, Todd Jones and Laurel Hoffman pleaded guilty to the following charge:

- **One count of Theft**

Afterward, Todd Jones and Laurel Hoffman were sentenced to six months in Cuyahoga County jail (suspended) and joint restitution (paid in full on May 18) was ordered in the amount of \$20,000 made payable to the Cleveland Metroparks.