

Position Paper

Illegal Wildlife Trade - A Threat to Our National Security ¹

What is Illegal Wildlife Trade?

Illegal wildlife trade involves the exchange of wild animal and plant resources by people. This can involve live animals and plants or a diverse range of products needed or prized by humans—including skins, medicinal ingredients, tourist curios, timber, fish and other food products. Most wildlife trade is probably within national borders, but there is a large volume of wildlife in trade internationally.²

Particularly alarming is the illegal wildlife trade in tiger parts, elephant ivory and rhino horns. The African Wildlife Foundation estimates that approximately eight percent of the 470,000 remaining African elephants are poached illegally each year or one every 20 minutes. The World Wildlife Fund indicates that between 1990 to 2005, on average 14 rhinos were killed in South Africa. Between 2007 and 2012 there was a 5000 percent increase in the poaching of rhinos, with over 900 killed in 2013 alone. Helping drive this slaughter is the value of elephant ivory and rhino horns on the Asian Black market. Ivory is worth roughly \$1,000 per kilogram or \$454 per pound, while rhino horn is \$60,000 per kilogram or \$27,300 per pound.³

The State Department estimates that today the trafficking of endangered wildlife products, including elephant ivory, rhino horns, and turtle shells generates revenues of between \$7 to \$10 billion annually and is the fourth most lucrative revenue stream for criminal gangs in Africa after drugs, counterfeiting, and human trafficking.⁴ It should be noted that these figures do not include illegal logging and fishing, which are estimated to account for an additional \$30 to \$100 billion annually.

How Does it Impact Our National Security?

High prices for illegal wildlife parts, combined with lax enforcement and security measures, have motivated the involvement of transnational organized crime syndicates, who view such

¹ Author of report is John Hazelroth and Sheila Gottsleben, concerned citizens living in Florida and annual financial contributor to the World Wildlife Fund

² TRAFFIC (the wildlife trade monitoring network), "Wildlife Trade, What is It?", published from the organization's website.

³ House Foreign Affairs Committee meeting on "International Wildlife Trafficking - Threats to Conservation and National Security", held on February 26, 2014.

⁴ UN Security Council report, "Cracking Down on Ivory Poaching and Illegal Wildlife Trade".

trafficking as an opportunity for large profits with a low risk of detection.⁵ This threat is very real - so real that the US intelligence community defines it as a major transnational organized crime threat. In March 2013, the Director of National Intelligence, James R. Clapper, testified before Congress on world-wide security threats. Mr. Clapper stated that. "Illicit trade in wildlife, timber, and marine resources constitutes a multi-billion industry annually, endangers the environment and threaten to disrupt the rule of law in important countries around the world".⁶ INTERPOL and the United Nations Commissions on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice have both recognized the increasing involvement of organized crime syndicates in wildlife crime Syndicates that carry out detailed planning, have significant financial support, understand/utilize new information technology, and are often well armed.⁷

Examples of two organizations profiting from the sale illegal wildlife parts include both al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda affiliate, and the Lord's Resistance Army, a rebel group operating from Uganda.

al-Shabaab is the group responsible for the attack on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya in September 2013 which 67 people lost their lives. In 2012, the Elephant Action League (EAL) estimated that "up to 40 percent" of the group activities were funded by the illegal ivory trade. EAL found that between one to three tons of ivory had passed through Somali ports each month, which resulted in between \$200,000 to \$600,000 for al-Shabaab.⁸ They found that the Kismayo Port became a financial savior for al Shabaab and that al-Shabaab acted as a middleman, filling orders from agents in end-user counties in Asia and in the Gulf states.⁹ It confirmed that this terrorist group pays better than average prices (US \$200 per kilogram in 2011-2012), making them desirable buyers of illicit ivory from small-time brokers. Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS), which has been cracking down on ivory smuggling at its ports and airports, has indirectly made al-Shabaab an even more attractive market, with a reputation for good prices, immediate payment, and ready access (to the ports of Marca and Kismayo, as well as the airport at Mogadishu).

As second example of profiteering from illegal wildlife trade involves the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).¹⁰ Once confined to Uganda, this group has now grown and is present in the

⁵ World Wildlife Fund for Nature and Dalberg, *Fighting Illicit Wildlife Trafficking*, 2012.

⁶ James R. Clapper (Director of National Intelligence), "Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community", Statement for the Record, Hearing, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, March 12, 2013.

⁷ John E. Scanlon (Secretary-General of the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). "Ivory and Insecurity: The Global Implications of Poaching in Africa", May 24, 2012.

⁸ Elephant Action League "Africa's White Gold of Jihad: al-Shabaab and Conflict Ivory", 2012

⁹ A Voice for Elephants, "Al-Shabaab and the Human Toll of the Illegal Ivory Trade", October 3, 2013.

¹⁰ The Guardian, "Lord's Resistance Army Funded by Elephant Poaching", June 4, 2013.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Central African Republic (CAR). This movement claims to fight for the rights of the Acholi people and over the past 24 years has carried out brutal attacks on remote villages across central Africa, and forced thousands of children to become soldiers and sex slaves. Eye witness accounts from park rangers, LRA escapees, and senior defectors report that Joseph Kony (Warlord) ordered African elephants to be killed in Garamba national park in CRA. Defectors also corroborate accounts that LRA transports ivory from DRC to CAR, where it is traded with Arab businessmen and officers from the Sudanese armed forces for cash, food, guns, ammunition, and medical supplies.

In a report to the UN Security Council, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon addressed these and other groups when he said that poaching and its potential links to other criminal, even terrorist, activities, “constitutes a grave menace to sustainable peace and security in centra Africa”.

Are There Other Negative Impacts of This Trade?

Besides the threat to our national security and the security of the free world, illegal wildlife trade results in other direct negative impacts. World Wildlife Fund, indicates that populations of species on earth have declined by an average 40 percent between 1970 and 2000, with the second largest direct threat to species survival, after habitat destruction, being wildlife trade. Wildlife is vital to the lives of a high proportion of the world's population, often the poorest.

Indirect negatives impacts include the introduction of invasive species which then prey on, or compete with, native species. Invasive species are as big a threat to the balance of nature as the direct overexploitation by humans of some species. This is now occurring at an alarming rate in south Florida. Another indirect negative impact involves the incidental killing of non-target species, such as dolphins and seabirds, when they are caught in fishing gear. It is estimated that over a quarter of the global marine fisheries catch is incidental, unwanted, and discarded. Incidental killing of animals also happens on land when crude traps are set (for example for musk deer).

How is Florida Impacted?

It is important to note that Florida is not immune from the negative impacts of illegal wildlife trade. Recently, two men were found guilty and sent to prison for the illegal trafficking in wildlife including sharks, tropical fish, and sea fans. They sold illegally around the country from their company in Grassy Key, known as Key Marine, Inc., and were caught in a sting operation called Operation Rock Bottom.¹¹

In addition to this incident, illegal trade has introduced non-native species into south Florida, and

¹¹ CBS Miami, “Two Florida Keys Men Get Prison For Wildlife Trafficking”, December 4, 2013.

more specifically the Everglades which is resulting in dramatic changes in the ecosystem of this fragile environment.

What Has Been in the US Recently to Address this Issue?

Congress has enacted a wide range of laws to authorize conservation programs, appropriate domestic/international funding for wildlife protection and natural resource capacity building, and target/dismantle wildlife trafficking operations. In recent years, Congress has also held hearings and events that have addressed the growing problem of wildlife crimes and raised key questions for the next steps.

What Can Congress Do Now to Further Address This Issue?

It is hoped that both interest and tangible results in wildlife crime continues in the 113th Congress. Tangible next steps should include, but are not limited to;

- Help wildlife law enforcement personnel by ensuring they have the additional tools they need to apprehend, prosecute and convict wildlife criminals. This includes providing law enforcement agencies the resources they need to enforce our existing laws. It also includes updating U.S. law to enact stronger penalties against wildlife trafficking by making it prosecutable under statutes used for other serious crimes, including drug trafficking, racketeering and money laundering.
- Provide additional funding and resources for law enforcement to support, for example, specialized investigative and forensic methodologies.
- Pass legislation that allows for the investing of funds generated through wildlife trafficking prosecutions into conservation efforts and/or to combat wildlife trafficking, as well as to ensure adequate authority to forfeit all proceeds of wildlife trafficking.