

Save Elephants and Rhinos: *Support H. 297, an Act Relating to the Sale of Ivory or Rhinoceros Horn*



Wildlife trafficking is an escalating global crisis that the President has identified as a threat to our national interests. The July 2013 Executive Order on Combating Wildlife Trafficking states “The poaching of protected species and the illegal trade in wildlife and their derivative parts and products (together known as “wildlife trafficking”) represent an international crisis that continues to escalate. Poaching operations have expanded beyond small-scale opportunistic actions, to coordinated slaughter commissioned by armed and organized criminal syndicates. The survival of protected wildlife species such as elephants [and other species] has beneficial economic, social, and environmental impacts that are important to

all nations. Wildlife trafficking reduces those benefits while generating billions of dollars in illicit revenues each year, contributing to the illegal economy, fueling instability, and undermining security.....For these reasons, it is in the national interest of the United States to combat wildlife trafficking.”¹

Elephant and rhino poaching may soon drive the species to the brink of extinction because of high demand for their ivory tusks and rhino horns. The ivory trade is so lucrative and poachers’ activities are so rampant that ivory has been given the name of “white gold” or “blood ivory.” According to The New York Times, raw ivory costs more than \$1,300 a pound.² In addition, political instability and corruption across Africa has made the enormous profits from the ivory black market a viable source for funding military resistance groups such as the Somalia-based Al-Qaeda affiliate, al-Shabaab, Janjaweed militia in Sudan and Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda. The African elephant population has declined by an estimated 50% over the last 40 years and the Asian elephant population has also been reduced by half compared to the beginning of the 20th century.³ From 2010 to 2012, more than 100,000 elephants in Africa were killed⁴. 1,215 rhinos were poached in 2014 in South Africa alone out of a remaining 29,000 left in the wild.



Cruel ivory and rhino horn trade impacts not just animals but also exacts human tolls. Poachers kill entire elephant families, including its youngest members as long as they have tusks. Because one third of the tusk is attached to the skull of the animal, poachers brutally hack off the face of the elephant to obtain the tusk. Elephant babies, who do not have tusks, are left as orphans unable to fend for themselves and often die if not rescued by humans. Rhinos often have their horns hacked off while still alive and are left to die. During the last decade, over a thousand park rangers across the world have been killed by poachers while on duty. The loss of park rangers has

¹ Executive Order 13648

² <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/02/world/asia/an-illicit-trail-of-african-ivory-to-china.html?adxnln=1&pagewanted=2&adxnlnx=1382464974-wCEOVI1v2INFACwuMh5K4A>

³ <http://www.fws.gov/international/pdf/factsheet-us-efforts-to-control-illegal-elephant-ivory-trade.pdf>

⁴ “Illegal killing for ivory drives global decline in African elephants”, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States, Vol.111, No.36. <http://www.pnas.org/content/111/36/13117>

had a ripple effect across the local communities and undermined the rule of law and governance of fragile democracies and our trading partners in Africa.



The U.S. is the second largest retail market for ivory in the world. Numerous states are joining the national and global movement to save these imperiled species. According to a 2008 report⁵, "Ivory Market in the USA", the United States has the largest retail market for ivory in the world, after China. The survey found 24,004 ivory items for sale and that an estimated one-third of the items are illegal. Unscrupulous wildlife traffickers purchased rhino horns at U.S. auction houses and shipped them illegally to Asia. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-led investigation, "Operation Crash", has resulted in more than two dozen arrests, involving trafficking of rhino horns and elephant ivory worth millions of dollars⁶. New York and New

Jersey enacted laws in 2014 to prohibit the sale of ivory and rhino horns.

State efforts would greatly complement federal implementation and enforcement in cracking down on the illegal ivory and rhino horn trade. Federal law regulates largely import, export and interstate (across the state lines) but not intrastate (within a state) sales. Current federal regulatory schemes on the ivory trade are convoluted and contain loopholes allowing continued ivory and rhino horn sales. Criminals have laundered illegal ivory into the market because of the ease of passing off new ivory as old, antique items. As the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stated, "It is extremely difficult to differentiate legally acquired ivory from ivory derived from elephant poaching. Our criminal investigations and anti-smuggling efforts have clearly shown that legal ivory trade can serve as a cover for illegal trade."⁷

Vermonters do not want to take part in the cruel ivory and rhino horn trade.



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⁵ <http://savetheelephants.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/2008IvoryMarketsUSA.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.fws.gov/southeast/news/pdf/OperationCrashSummaryOctober2014.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.fws.gov/international/travel-and-trade/ivory-ban-questions-and-answers.html#2>