

H. 297: An act relating to the sale of ivory or rhinoceros horns
Testimony of Rep. Kate Webb
Chittenden 5-1: Shelburne
3/16/16

We will never see an African Western Black Rhino in the wild again. Never. Elephants are on a similar path. Without change, African elephants will be extinct in 10 years. Deaths are brutal – cyanide poisoning in wells, paralyzing and harvesting while still alive, destroying families and leaving orphans.

On 2/26/14, Kerri-Anne Jones, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs before the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, stated that the illegal ivory trade is a multi-billion dollar criminal enterprise expanded from a conservation concern to an acute security threat. Increasing involvement of organized crime in poaching and wildlife trafficking promotes corruption, threatens the peace and security of fragile regions, strengthens illicit trade routes, destabilizes economies and communities that depend on wildlife for their livelihoods, in particular the African wildlife tourism industry estimated to provide 20 million jobs¹– good jobs.

What can we, in tiny little Vermont do about this? We can help reduce its value at the retail level – a trade that is a huge cover for the illegal trade. Just how much new illegal ivory may be "laundered" as antique is unclear. A study of ivory for sale in Los Angeles in 2014 commissioned by the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group, found as much as 60 percent may have been prohibited under federal law.²

The study's author (*Daniel Stiles*) cautioned that determining the age of ivory by visual examination is subjective. The only way to firmly date ivory is based on carbon dating and DNA tests, which are costly and require cutting into the ivory.

Although the US Government has an important role to play in addressing wildlife trafficking and has made efforts to prohibit sales across state lines, it cannot solve the problem alone. One by one by one we must close this loophole and prohibit the sale within state boundaries. New York did it. New Jersey did it. California did it. Wildlife traffickers, like all smugglers, seek venues with weak jurisdictions. Nobody can do everything but everybody can do something. Come on, Vermont, we can do it too.

A recent letter complained that "without the ability to legally transfer these items, they would essentially be valueless," and that is precisely the point.

¹ Keri-Ann Jones. Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Oceans and International environmental And Scientif Affairs before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, US House of representatives 2/26/14

² http://docs.nrdc.org/wildlife/files/wil_15010601a.pdf