

Destruction of U.S. Ivory Stockpile: Questions and Answers

About the crush:

1. Why is the United States destroying elephant ivory?

We want to send a clear message that the United States will not tolerate ivory trafficking and the toll it is taking on elephant populations, particularly in Africa. The United States believes that it is important to destroy ivory seized as a result of law enforcement investigations and at international ports of entry because elephant poaching in Africa is at its worst in decades and we are committed to protecting elephants from extinction. Destroying this ivory tells criminals who engage in poaching and trafficking that the United States will take all available measures to disrupt and prosecute those who prey on and profit from the deaths of these magnificent animals.

2. Has the U.S. Government ever done this before?

No. The Fish and Wildlife Service has stored contraband ivory at the National Wildlife Property Repository and other appropriate facilities. The agency has never before destroyed large quantities of ivory.

3. Why wasn't the ivory destroyed when it was seized?

Elephant ivory and other seized wildlife is maintained as evidence until criminal and civil cases are concluded. Once cases are resolved, the Service uses items that are examples of illegal wildlife trade for educational purposes and for training our law enforcement officers. Over the past 25 years, we have accumulated far more elephant ivory than we can use for these purposes and decided to destroy this stockpile as a demonstration of our commitment to combating wildlife trafficking.

4. Have other countries destroyed ivory stockpiles?

Yes. The Philippines (which like the United States represents a market for illegally acquired elephant ivory) did so in June 2013. Kenya burned large quantities of ivory in 1989 and again in 2011, as did Gabon in 2012. Both countries hold large populations of elephants that are vulnerable to poaching.

5. Why doesn't the Service sell the ivory?

The ivory being destroyed has been confiscated and then forfeited or abandoned as a result of criminal investigations and anti-smuggling efforts. In our view, illegal ivory has no value in the United States and should not be allowed to enter the marketplace.

6. Why did the Service decide to crush the ivory instead of burning it?

Ivory is very resistant to burning, and so typically still requires crushing to break it down into pieces small enough to be of no commercial value. Crushing from the beginning is thus more efficient for destroying ivory. Crushing also eliminates air quality concerns and fire risks that could be associated with an ivory "burn."

7. In the future, will the Service destroy forfeited ivory?

Yes. However, the Service will retain small amounts of ivory for use in conservation outreach and education as well as ivory needed for investigative and forensic purposes and for training our wildlife law enforcement officers, our wildlife detector dogs, and officers with our partner agencies (such as U.S. Customs and Border Protection).

About the ivory:

8. How much elephant ivory will be destroyed?

The Service plans to destroy nearly six tons of African and Asian elephant ivory. The ivory to be destroyed includes full tusks, carved tusks, and hundreds of smaller carvings and other objects.

9. How did the Service acquire this ivory?

The ivory to be crushed was seized and then abandoned or forfeited to the Service as a result of its criminal investigations and anti-smuggling efforts at the nation's ports of entry.

10. Over what time period was this ivory accumulated?

Most of this ivory was seized by Service law enforcement officers from the late-1980s to the present.

11. What types of crimes were committed in connection with these seizures?

Some of the ivory was smuggled into the United States in large quantities; some was also intercepted on its way out of the country or as it was being unlawfully sold in interstate commerce. Some arrived in the U.S. without the appropriate Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) permits or was brought back by travelers who did not know (or did not follow) wildlife laws and regulations.

Laws violated in connection with the ivory seizures include the Endangered Species Act (which implements CITES in the United States), the African Elephant Conservation Act, and the Lacey Act.

12. What will the Service do with the crushed ivory?

The Service is still determining what to do with the remnants of the crushed ivory. We are working with conservation organizations and other groups to determine how best to use this material to increase awareness of the global poaching crisis and commemorate this historic event.

About elephants:

13. How are African elephants protected?

The African elephant is listed as threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA) and is also protected under the African Elephant Conservation Act. Nations across the world regulate trade in this species under CITES.

Under these U.S. laws, it is generally illegal to:

- Import or export African elephant ivory for primarily commercial purposes
- Import or export it for other purposes without CITES documents
- Buy or sell unlawfully imported African elephant ivory in interstate commerce

14. Are there any exceptions?

Yes. At present, U.S. laws and regulations accommodate the following:

- The import of unworked African elephant ivory (i.e., raw tusks) as part of a lawfully taken sport-hunted trophy for which appropriate CITES permits are presented
- The import and export (including for commercial purposes) of worked African elephant ivory that meets the requirements for an “antique” under the ESA (CITES document required)
- Export (including commercial) of ivory that qualifies as “pre-Act” under the ESA and “pre-Convention” under CITES
- Sale within the United States of African elephant ivory lawfully imported into the U.S. as “antique” under the ESA or before the 1989 import moratorium under the African Elephant Conservation Act
- Sale of legally acquired African elephant ivory within the United States unless restricted by “use after import” limitations associated with items imported after the listing of the species under CITES or unless prohibited under State law

15. What is being done to protect elephant populations in the wild?

In addition to its law enforcement efforts, the Fish and Wildlife Service also works to support on-the-ground efforts to conserve elephants through the Wildlife Without Borders African Elephant Conservation Fund and the Africa Regional Program. These programs, in partnership with government agencies, private organizations, and local communities, are supporting initiatives to conserve and manage African elephants through law enforcement, habitat management, community initiatives, and other effective conservation methods.

In 2012, the Service awarded grants for African elephant conservation totaling \$1,397,916, which raised an additional \$1,606,004 in leveraged funds. Field projects in 13 countries were supported and had an intense focus on the protection of vulnerable elephant populations and increasing the capacity of partner countries to prevent poaching and the trafficking of ivory and elephant products. These projects include development of partnerships between African wildlife and law enforcement agencies and their Southeast Asian counterparts to detect and intercept illegally trafficked wildlife and to improve prosecution rates. For more information on Wildlife Without Borders and the international wildlife conservation efforts it supports, visit <http://www.fws.gov/international/wildlife-without-borders/>

16. Why does the Service allow the import of African elephant ivory as sport-hunted trophies?

Some African nations authorize sport hunting under specific conditions as part of their management and conservation of African elephant populations. Revenues from these hunting programs help fund conservation work (i.e., science-based management of the species and law enforcement) while providing needed jobs and income to local communities. The U.S. supports well-managed conservation programs that use sport hunting as a conservation tool – when such programs can be shown to contribute to the overall survival of the species in the wild. Sport hunters and hunting organizations have been strong supporters of efforts to combat poaching and trafficking, as well as sustainable game management programs in Africa and other areas of the world.

17. Why are African elephant populations at risk?

The continent's elephants are being slaughtered for ivory at unprecedented rates. Populations of both savannah and forest elephants have dropped precipitously with forest elephants in the Central African zone receiving the most poaching pressure.

18. Why has demand for elephant ivory surged in recent years?

Improved economic conditions in traditional ivory markets such as China and other parts of East Asia are fueling an increased demand for elephant ivory. More Asian consumers have the resources to purchase ivory, and ivory carvings rate high as a “status symbol” for new economic elites.

19. What is happening to African elephant populations in the wild?

An estimated 11,000 forest elephants were killed in the past decade in one park alone (Gabon's Minkebe National Park), and the total population of forest elephants is down by an estimated 62 percent in that time period across the Central Africa zone. Elephant massacres have taken place in Chad, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic in the past year, as well-armed and organized criminal enterprises have taken advantage of insufficient protection capacity in remote landscapes.

20. Are Asian elephant populations also threatened?

Asian elephant populations are also at risk, but more from habitat loss and the loss of ancient migratory routes in the face of rapidly expanding human populations than the ivory trade.