

Norton Announces Emergency Grants to Stop Elephant and Rhino Slaughter in Africa

Interior Secretary Gale Norton today announced \$140,000 in emergency grants to stop the illegal slaughter of elephants and rhinoceros in Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo along the country's border with Sudan.

The Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is awarding the grants to the non-profit International Rhino Foundation, which is leading the effort to stop poaching by Sudanese poachers, known as "the horsemen," who kill the elephants and rhinos to acquire ivory and horns for sale on the black market.

"The Sudanese horsemen have killed almost 1,000 elephants in the past year and are on the verge of eliminating the last wild population of northern white rhinos," Norton said. "The emergency grants will help train and equip park rangers and allow aerial surveillance by anti-poaching teams."

Garamba rangers have been overwhelmed by the heavily armed poachers, and two rangers have been killed while defending the park.

"These poachers are unscrupulous and violent, motivated by greed," Norton said. "They have systematically destroyed wildlife populations throughout the Central African savannas and now they are focusing on what's left in the Garamba National Park."

In April, park rangers sighted a poacher on horseback, six armed men on foot and approximately 25 donkeys with heavy packs. In their wake, the rangers found 12 freshly-dead elephants and two rhinos with only ivory tusks, and horns removed.

"If something isn't done immediately, the Northern White rhino will probably be lost forever," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Steve Williams. "We need to give the Garamba rangers the help they need to protect these rare animals."

The grants are being issued through the Service's "Wildlife Without Borders" program that administers funds appropriated by Congress for conservation of wild animals and their natural habitats. A grant of \$84,900 is being awarded under the African Elephant Conservation Fund; a second grant in the amount of \$55,400 is being awarded from the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund. These grants cannot be used to purchase firearms.

The Service expects international conservation organizations and private donors to contribute as much as \$150,000 in additional support. The International Rhino Foundation is working in partnership with other organizations such as Conservation International, the International Elephant Foundation, Save the Rhino International, the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Frankfurt Zoological Society, the World Wildlife Fund, the Zoological Society of London, the World Bank and the United Nations Foundation-UNESCO.

In 1980, Garamba National Park was established by the United Nations as a "World Heritage Site." In 1996, it was listed as a "World Heritage Site in Danger."

Video footage available to news media