



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Statement on Sri Lanka's Destruction of Ivory Stockpile January 29, 2016

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) applauds the government of Sri Lanka for becoming the first country in South Asia to destroy its stockpile of confiscated ivory. On January 26, 2016, Sri Lanka crushed and burned 359 tusks, approximately 1.5 metric tons of ivory, in a public awareness event in Colombo. These actions demonstrated Sri Lanka's strong stance against the illegal killing of elephants and added their nation to a growing international movement to combat wildlife trafficking.

Sri Lanka's elephant population, which numbers more than 5,500 individuals according to estimates from the country's government, is threatened mainly by habitat destruction and human-wildlife conflict. The Service has supported 38 conservation projects in Sri Lanka since 2000. A recent project included the expansion of the "Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants" (MIKE) program to address the specific needs of the South Asia region. MIKE, a monitoring system created through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), tracks trends and patterns of elephant poaching to improve international, sub-regional, and national decision making in support of elephant conservation.

Forensic analysis of DNA samples from Sri Lanka's stockpile and the investigative work of Sri Lankan authorities indicated that the seized ivory originated mostly from Tanzania and northern Mozambique and was destined for the United Arab Emirates, providing evidence for Sri Lanka's role as a transit hub for ivory trafficking. The Service commends the foresight of the government of Sri Lanka to hold the seized ivory until forensic analysis could be performed, providing invaluable evidence of black market routes that will give insight into future seizures and arrests. The combination of strong public awareness statements, application of forensic and monitoring tools, and international collaboration will continue to help combat the illegal wildlife trade for the benefit of future generations.